
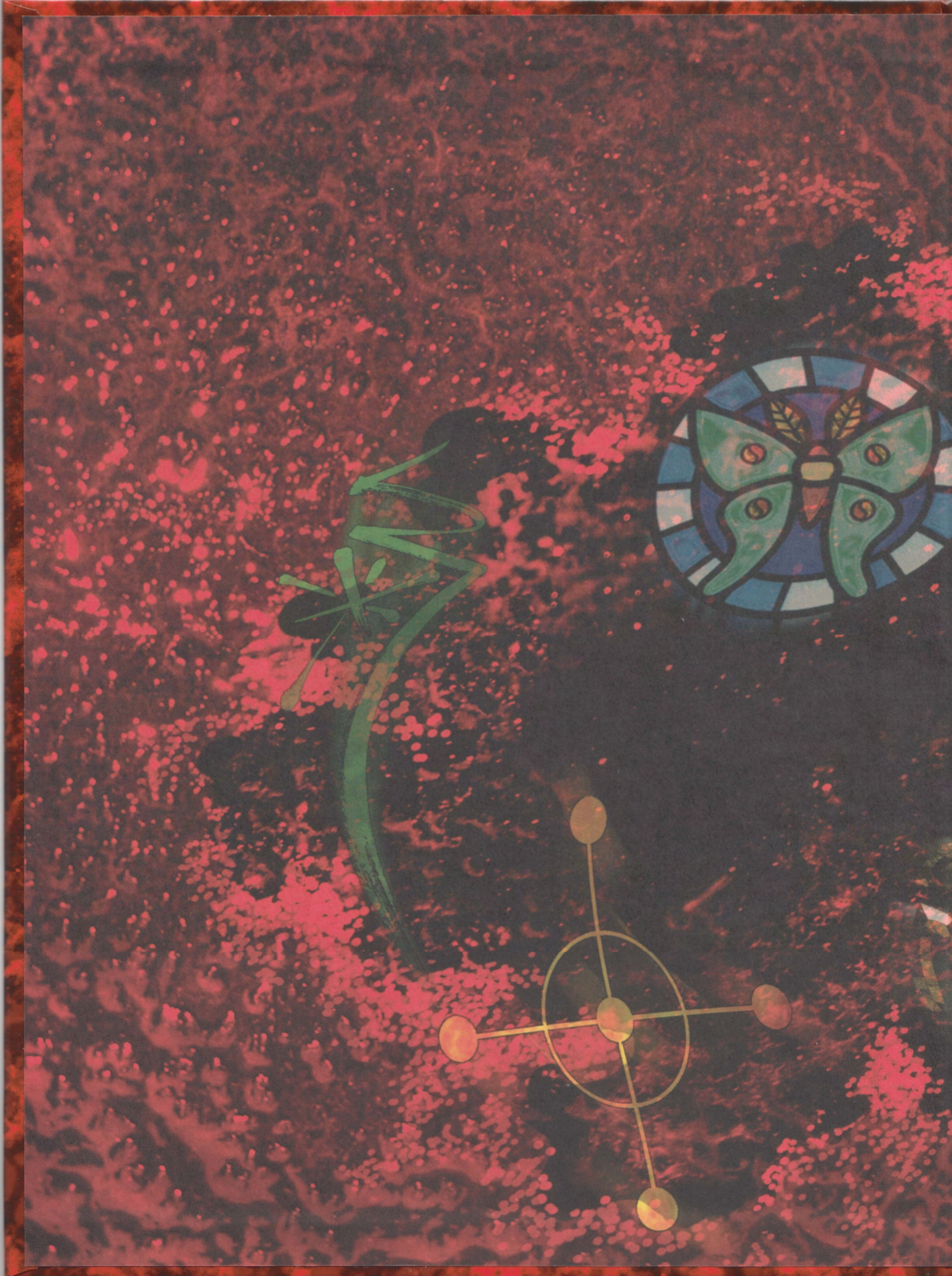


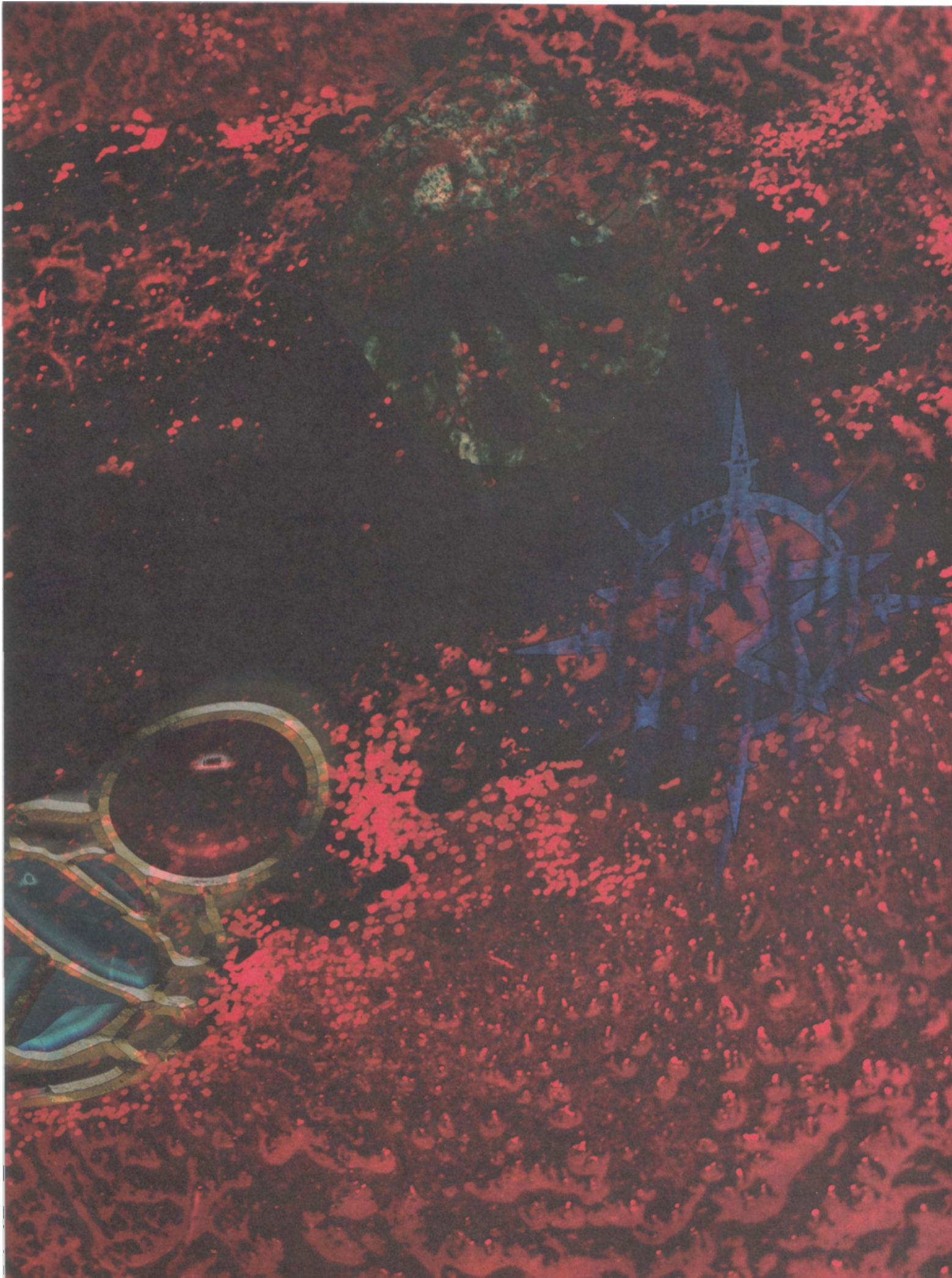
WORLD OF DARKNESS TIME OF JUDGMENT



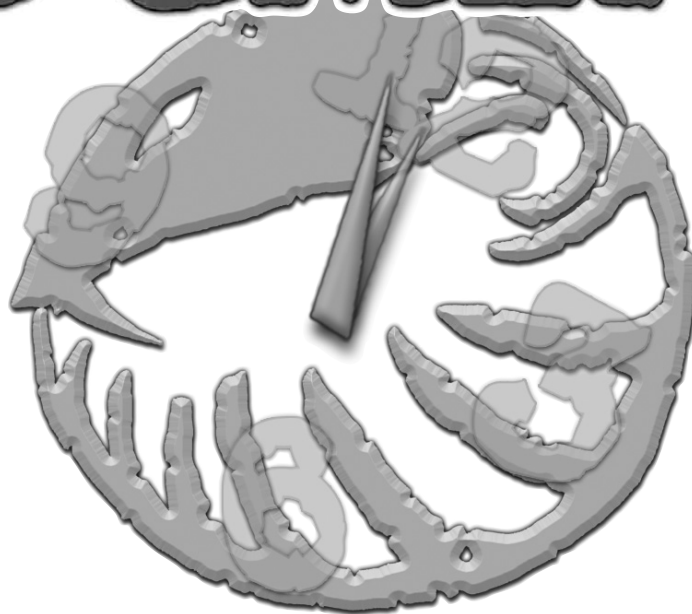
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WORLD OF DARKNESS TIME OF JUDGMENT™



BY DAVID CARROLL, MICHAEL GOODWIN, ELEANOR HOLMES, STEVE KENSON, CARRIE ANN LEWIS,
PATRICK O'DUFFY, GREG STOLZE, KYLA WARD, CHUCK WENDIG AND PETER WOODWORTH.
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WORLD OF DARKNESS TIME OF JUDGMENT™

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PROLOGUE: RIGHT and WRONG

I can tell you exactly where I was when I realized the world was ending. I was in a gas station — a BP Amoco — filling up the Bentley, buying a Slim Jim and a pack of Camels, and getting that look from the cashier like, “Who drives a Bentley and eats Slim Jims?” I glanced over at the porn rack behind the counter, the high opaque kind that covers everything but the top quarter of the magazine. I could see the faces on a couple covers and I thought, “Huh. *Club* has a cuter cover girl than *Playboy* does.”

And then I realized the world was ending. Not just “going to end,” which I’d known forever. That it *was* ending, that the end had *started*, that the end wasn’t near or nigh, but *now*.

★ ★ ★

It wasn’t the porn mags that tipped me off, of course. I’m just being a smartass. I felt the imminent eschaton with senses that humans generally

don’t have. You might get a taste of them here or there, when you have a sudden feeling of dread right before the phone rings with bad news. Or that shiver that runs down your spine for no reason that you can divine.

There’s a reason for it. It’s just that most people can’t decipher the meaning. It’s like a fish looking at a newspaper. He can see the letters as well as you or me, but it doesn’t tell him jack shit about UN resolutions or global warming.

What I felt was a clamor of calling souls, a multitude of spirits invoking me, imploring me, calling me in searching and desperate tones.

I heard voices I’ve known for aeons, voices from the dawn of time. I had gotten well used to the vague susurrations of pleas, but in an instant they went from a murmur to a blaring blast. Where they called me from the edges of existence before, now they shouted from as close as the cashier. That was what

tipped me off: A thousand voices of torment and damnation, all calling my name.

★ ★ ★

I could tell you my name, but letters aren't really sufficient. I had high hopes for binary. It's been proved, mathematically proved, that any datum that can be *known* can be expressed as a series of ones and zeroes. Back in the '80s, when I was an optimist and thought computers might fix everything, I translated my name into binary. In eight-point type, it covered 666 pages.

You might as well call me Lucifer, and just so you know, I don't really enjoy smoking or eating salty snacks or looking at pornography. I do not enjoy. I cannot. I put on a good show when sipping fine wine or eating exquisite viands or making love to a magazine model, but there is no true happiness for me.

I can conceive enjoyment. I receive a certain intellectual satisfaction from undergoing "pleasure." It suits me to arrange matters pleasantly. I prefer beauty to ugliness, the scent of a rose to the stink of a turd, the caress of silk to the rasp of burlap. But the absence of pain is not pleasure, and any mental comfort I achieve is very sterile next to actual joy.

I keep trying, though. I keep thinking that maybe one day I'll trick myself into *thinking* I'm happy, which might be very much more like *being* happy. "Fake it till you make it," as they say. So I eat like a king and fuck like a rock star and I get a bumper sticker that says, "Heaven Doesn't Want Me and Hell's Afraid I'll Take Over."

I've been faking it since mankind tamed fire, and I haven't made it yet.

Instead of happiness, I have duty.

★ ★ ★

I heard those calls, those screams, not long after a trip to California. I'd learned there, to my great dismay, that some of my former colleagues in the creation of the world had slipped free from bondage and were enjoying the world of men once more. Or, at least, they were trying to.

I'd hoped that it was a small trickle, an unusual high-water mark in the human history of calling the fallen. But those voices... no. I knew then that this was something new, something very different.

I realized then that I had months, maybe a year or two to stop the apocalypse if I was lucky. I'm used to working on the scale of decades or centuries. Foiling every demon in Hell would be a tall order, even with that kind of leeway.

But I felt compelled to try. I started the process of activating "Days of Fire." I called together money and

followers. I threw every roadblock I could in front of the emerging demonic horde.

What else was I going to do?

Now it's a year and a half later, and I'm sharing some coffee with Woodrow Miller, an important element of my cobbled-together plan.

It's not just any coffee, however. This coffee came out of a cat's ass.

"Here's a theory about evil," I say, pushing the cup at him. "Evil just happens. Like ground fog, it rises up in miniscule, intangible amounts. Like a dog-shit stink, it sticks to your clothes. Unlike stink, however, you can pass evil on if you choose. When one person gets enough evil passed into him, he can either ground it or do something really wicked to pass it further along, diffusing it to hundred or thousands or millions of others. Sometimes the evil charge is so great, the right thing for the guy to do is die. Get crushed by a tank in China or let the Nazis kill him before he rats out the Jews he's hiding. Get nailed on a cross, for all I know."

"You a Christian now, Cook?"

Woodrow doesn't know me. He thinks I'm his friend Cook. He also doesn't know the provenance of his beverage.

He takes a sip.

"What do you think?"

"Wow! This stuff is fantastic!"

Okay, it's not *really* cat-shit coffee. It's civet-shit coffee. For \$300 a pound, you can get coffee made from the very, *very* carefully cleaned beans that were eaten at the peak of their ripeness by Sumatran palm civets — a sort of nocturnal cat-like frugivore — and then pooped out, now mellowly fragrant by the animal's digestive juices and the scent glands in its butt.

No one but a human would have thought of making coffee from this stuff. To a demon or angel, it would be unthinkable. They can't hopscotch around ideological categories, edit something from "waste" to "food" the way human beings can. A demon would never have invented the windmill, or developed single-point perspective, or thought of broadcasting verbal descriptions of baseball over the radio. We can create, but not truly invent or innovate. Not like humans do. Well, *some* humans. Maybe only one in a thousand or a million.

That's why Woodrow is important. I need a human to see what I can't see. To invent what I can't. "It's imported," I say.

"Really good." Another sip and he frowns. "But I think you're full of it with this 'evil is a stink' business. You really think Hitler just... what?"

"Okay, here's how it works. You get up in the morning and your shoestring breaks. It pisses you off — creates a negative emotional charge. You express it by flicking off a fellow motorist. Now *she's* got the negative charge, so she gets to work and yells at her secretary, who goes home and withholds sex from her boyfriend, who provokes an argument and then goes out drinking, and whose hangover makes him flick off *five* people in traffic the next day, by which time you've forgotten all about your shoelace."

"So if I'd just laughed off my problems, it would have forestalled unhappiness and therefore evil?"

"Sure, why not?"

"It just seems that it would take a lot of shoelaces to turn someone into Jeffrey Dahmer."

"It works on a bigger scale, too. Your mom gets cancer so you beat your wife."

"While if I just grit my teeth and play the stoic?"

"Yeah. If you confront your misery as your own instead of making it everyone else's, you protect the world from it."

"Evil just happens, but good has to be chosen."

"Very succinctly put."

"Kind of stacks the deck toward human misery, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps."

We both sip again. Woodrow thinks. I can *feel* him thinking.

"So Columbine and 9/11 were ultimately caused by broken shoelaces? All the ills of the world can be traced back to crybabies who just wouldn't man up?"

"Got a better theory?"

"It doesn't wash. There's got to be more to it."

"Well, it's a hard sell because there's no one to blame. People like scapegoats."

"Every God needs a Satan," he says.

I smile.

★ ★ ★

There's a man following me. I can see and hear him, but not sense him.

I think he's one of the Bright Shiners — one of humankind's defenders for the last days. Or if you prefer, "The cosmos' last desperate attempt to get the place cleaned up before Mom comes home and sees all the beer cans and cigarette butts in the yard."

If I was typical, my inability to detect him would give him a big advantage — maybe even let him get the drop on me. But my secret senses are primary, and a man that I can see and hear, but not instantly know his past, hopes and trends for the

future? He stands out like a sore thumb, if you know how to look.

Nevertheless, I've got other fish to fry. I'll deal with him later, or just avoid him until the crisis is over... or until the planet is just a ball of ash orbiting a bigger ball of ash.

Woodrow is coming along. I have carefully set out the path before him. His boss has been corrupted, but even that plays to my advantage. I know his master's master, and his flaw is curiosity. I can make him curious. I can make him push Woodrow to learn and discover, and if he gets the hints, finds the clues, makes the leap on his own...

How I want to just push Woodrow, to just show him. But unless he learns the numbers on his own, he can never solve a problem to which all angels and demons are blind.

I pull the Bentley into a mall parking lot, grab a heavy paper bag from the glove box, open the car door, and appear before a wood door in Boston. (It's a door I hand built about 120 years ago. Nice house. I did a good job on it.)

I scan. Yves is downstairs. Down I go. He's surprised to see me.

"Ernest? I didn't even know you were in town!" A little shadow of doubt flickers across his face. "How did...? Did I leave the back door open?"

"Sorry, Yves. I hope you don't mind being sacrificed for the greater good."

"I beg your pardon?"

Now he looks really confused, but not half as puzzled as when I pull out the gun and put a bullet under his toupee.

Poor bastard. He did a good job translating "Days of Fire" and was a fairly decent fellow besides, but *tempus fugit*. The next door I step through takes me to Los Angeles. It's Vera's house, and she's got guests. I hear them. Good.

It takes just a moment to change my look, another moment to anticipate her next move. Mm... kitchen. In about two minutes. Freshening a drinky-poo.

I look around while I wait for her. She's remodeled. Very stark and austere. Probably cost a pretty penny. But with the reprint of *her* translation of "Days of Fire," she can surely afford it.

In she walks.

"Andrew?" she says. "I didn't see you come in!"

I don't like Vera as much, so I don't even bother with the "greater good" line. I just drill her.

There's plenty of commotion in the living room when they hear the shot, so I'm through a pantry

doorway and into a men's room stall in a Virginia gas station. I change my appearance, become a generic-looking black dude, and put the murder weapon back into its paper bag. I turn to the door and leave without washing my hands.

It's about a mile and a half to Woodrow's house. I don't see the quickest way, but I learn it. I put the paper bag down on the floor of his wood deck. It could use a coat of water sealer. I knock on his back door and hide myself from mortal sight. When he opens the door he's got a pistol in his hand and a worried look on his face. Another clue. If I could pray, I would pray that Woodrow gets the hint.

★ ★ ★

"Okay, how about Cody Brunswick?" Woodrow asks. He looks haggard. He's met his friend Cook (me) at the local Starbucks and I'm treating. "He doesn't fit your pattern."

"My pattern?"

"Your evil-ground-fog-hot-potato pattern. Do you remember Brunswick?"

"Remind me."

"He was an embezzler, but that's not... When he went into the pen, I wound up visiting him a lot. You know, trying to follow the money trail. But he, I dunno, I think he was pretty lonely and he wound up telling me all kinds of weird stuff."

"Oh yeah? Weird how?"

"Sex weird."

"Uh oh."

"Check this out. He's only hot for victimized women. Brunswick would find women who'd been raped or molested as children or whatever. That's who he dated. When he was with a woman who *hadn't* been messed up like that, he told me he had to *pretend she was*."

"Jesus."

"And there was no abuse or neglect or miserable tragedy in his childhood. He wasn't from a broken home. He insisted he hadn't... you know."

"Yeah."

"There was no reason except that he liked it. I mean, he told me just how to approach them. How he was always the Sensitive New Age Guy, shy, retiring, non-threatening."

"Mr. Fuzzy Sweater."

"Yeah. These women had lousy self-esteem, were eager to please and terrified of being alone, so *they* decided they had to put out for *him*."

For a moment, we just sit. I can tell this really bothers Woodrow, on top of all the threat and mystery I've confronted him with. All the stuff about the

books, the translations of "Days of Fire." I feel bad. I wish I could bring him along gently, but there's no time, no way...

And it's *working*. To him, Cody Brunswick is part of it. He's made that uniquely human intuitive leap and roped this embezzling fucko into the realm of demons and cryptic texts and impossible murders. It's very encouraging.

"There's no accumulated misfortune on him," he says. "And at least half his ex's have no idea that he was only interested in them *because of* their history. So Brunswick seems to refute your 'shit happens' theory."

"Why does he disgust you so much?"

"Doesn't he make you sick?"

No. "Of course, but stay with me. If these women aren't getting hurt — and if they never figure it out, right? If they're not hurt, why is it bad?"

"Because he's using them. Because he doesn't see them as people. They're just... something that gratifies him."

"So it's a matter of intent."

"Are we going to debate Immanuel Kant?"

"If that's your thing, though you look tired enough without trying to curb-stomp the Categorical Imperative."

Categorical Imperative says intent is all that matters. Any time you use a person merely as a means to an end, instead of considering her with the regard due to a person with inherent value, you commit an unethical act. But if you do the wrong thing for the right reason, you're okay.

"I think Kant would agree that Cody was a shit."

"But from the Utilitarian perspective...?"

Utilitarianism is the opposite. Result is all that matters. If it's the greatest good for the greatest number, it's good. Now, there are some jazzy variations on this that hedge it with rules so you don't condone 51 people killing and eating and stealing the gold fillings of 49 people, but *basically* 'greatest good for greatest number.' Utilitarianism has no problem with doing the right thing for the wrong reason.

"He still flunks out," Woodrow insists. "Even if they don't find out, it's possible that they *could*."

"Potential harm isn't real harm. By that standard, I'm negligent for keeping a knife in my house because a guest might find it and poke his eye out."

"There are degrees of potential harm."

"Listen to yourself! 'Degrees of harm'? You sound like a candyass! Why don't you just cowboy up with Kant and insist that intent is the arbiter?"

"Because good intentions make a lousy umbrella! I don't want to have to forgive every ignorant fuckup who shrugs and says, 'I meant well!'"

We pause.

"What's really bothering you?" I ask.

He sighs. "I want you to help me find some people. People who follow a book called 'Days of Fire.'"

"Never heard of it."

★ ★ ★

Woodrow wasn't my only hope, of course. There were three angels sent to Hell along with the multitude of demons. Three who did evil in the service of the Allmaker. Three who are arguably like me.

Usiel the Slayer almost comes to my side. Almost. Ultimately, he fails to admit his rage against God, and because of that it consumes him.

The Angel of Pain rejects me, too, insisting that God must wish to consume the world in sorrow and lamentation. She thinks she has been freed to ensure each allotment of suffering. Now, unlike before, she will do her duty.

As for Forguel, aeons in the pit have either maddened her or given her guile beyond even my knowing. She allies herself with Asmodeus, the strongest of my enemies.

Right after one inconclusive engagement with Forguel and her minions (I killed five of them but she got away), I feel what I've wanted. What I've hoped for and eagerly expected ever since I killed Yves and Vera.

Piercing all the invoking demons on Earth and in the Abyss, I hear the call from Woodrow. I hear him and I know. *He's got it.* He understands. He's read the Greek and Latin and he's made the jump from those old languages to the *oldest* language. He's followed the hints and implications and the interactions and double meanings, and he's learned.

He knows what it all means and he calls me.

When I appear before him, we're in a rundown wooden building. It's night and he's bleeding. He doesn't see me as Cook. He doesn't see me as I am, either. There's no percentage in messing up his fine, fine brain. I show him a piece of me. Enough to dazzle, but not enough to madden.

He looks up at me from the floor and gives a sick little grin.

"The last time I got shot, I didn't hallucinate," he says, "So I'm hoping you're real."

There's a crack of gunfire from outside and he flinches.

I smile, raise my hands and put time in abeyance.

"You're safe for the moment," I say.

He turns to the doorway. It's pitch black, of course, since even the light outside is frozen in relation to us.

"What did you do?"

"Oh please," I say, and breathe on him. His wound knits, eliciting a small grunt as the bullet — looks like a 10mm, a funny caliber — plinks out on the floor.

He looks at me and swallows hard. Then (and I love this) he pushes himself to his feet. Bravo, Woodrow! Face me on your feet like an equal!

"So, what now?"

"What do you expect?"

He shrugs. "You offer me the world and all its riches?"

"Bioweapon contamination has leaked into Europe, Bethlehem is in flames, China is rattling its sabers at India and Pakistan, nobody from NASA or any of the observatories will give a straight answer about just what the Red Star is, and no one can seem to find a girl baby born in the last six months. Do you particularly *want* the world?"

"When you put it like that..."

"Then how about this," I ask. "Do you want there to *be* a world?"

He's silent for a moment, and then nods.

"What do I have to do?"

"You've read the book. You *know* what you have to do."

"Find the third trail."

"If there is one. I can't point it out to you, can't find it for you."

"Why not?"

For just a moment, I'm angry. Not just angry — furious. Humans have the potential for so much but the drive to do so little! For just one blinding second, I consider letting Dagon and Belial have their way with the whole human race. Let them ring the curtain down on the whole shitty mess.

But it passes. Humans aren't perfect. They weren't meant to be.

"I can't do it for you for the same reason I can't fall in love for you. It must be *yours*."

"What if I refuse?"

"You can't be serious."

He sighs. "Can you at least tell me how to start?"

"You start with a pledge."

"Do I?"

"Come now. This can't be such a surprise." This is it. The hard part. I can protect him as my thrall.

Improve him. Maybe give him the power he needs to drive back the darkness. But it has to be his choice. His free choice.

"It's never a surprise when something like you wants service."

Oh, Woodrow. Don't take that cynical tone with me. "I don't want you to serve me," I say. "I want us to help each other. You felt me heal you. If we swear an oath we can work together. Share our strength..."

"Yeah, I get your gifts and you get my soul, right?"

"I don't want one lousy human soul. I want to ensure the future of humankind!"

"Your future?"

"Any future!"

He looks at me from beneath a furrowed brow and I can't stand it. I can't stand the mistrust. After all the years, centuries and ages of being maligned for trying to help, and here's the payoff. All the years of lies and propaganda against me bear fruit.

"Woodrow, it's your *only chance*."

Maybe, somehow, this one mortal sees through my lie. Or maybe he just disbelieves because he can't shake off a lifetime of Bible stories. Or because he is, at heart, a suspicious cop who can only ever see me as a suspect.

"No sale. Sorry."

"Woodrow, I'm *begging*."

"Get behind me, Satan," he says with a sneer and that's it. His mind's made up. It's clear as the nose on his face. I can see the futures spreading out of him like spilled ink. His mind's made up. He won't change — *can't* change.

He's going to damn the world to save his own soul.

"You selfish prick," I say, and something else in Enochian. Then Woodrow Miller is no more.

★ ★ ★

To cap everything off, that fucking Bright Shiner finds me again in the middle of nowhere, Kansas. Mr. No Trace. An ugly little pissant. I see him watching as I pull out from my hotel in my Land Rover and suddenly I'm fed up. I goggle my eyes at him like I'm just now noticing, then floor it down the highway.

He follows, just like I planned, and when the time feels right I pull off the highway, jump the ditch and start laying a path in some poor bastard's field of wheat stumps. There's a copse of trees maybe a half-mile in, probably the farmer's swimming hole on the seam of two fields. A good place to have it out with this guy.

He's got a gun in his hand as he stops his car and gets out. Smith & Wesson, looks like a Bodyguard or Bodyguard Airweight.

"Hello, Wendell," I say.

If he's surprised that I know his name, he doesn't show it. Those eyes of his are pretty well glazed.

Sure, I couldn't get a supernatural scan of this guy, but I know how to hire a private investigator.

He points the gun.

"You don't need that," I say. "Let's talk things out."

"Come out where I can see you."

It's a calculated risk, but what's he gonna do? Kill me? Worst he can do is slow me down, I reckon, and probably not even that.

"Do you know who I am, Wendell?"

"The Shepherds are unsure about you."

Shepherds. Good name — this guy certainly looks like a sheep. I wonder who they are? If I had enough time I could probably suss out their Names. But Wendell won't give me that much time. Neither will Azrael or the other Earthbound.

"I don't suppose you're open to a lateral career move? Whatever they're giving you, I bet I can do better."

"You cannot tempt me."

"You sure? Doing the right thing for the wrong reason has always been popular."

"Their will is my will."

When he says it — flat, honest, empty — I realize he's telling the truth and it jolts me. Those bastards have really done it. They've taken a human being and hollowed him out until he's just their puppet. They stick in their hand and he works like their oven mitt while they root around in this burning world.

"The Almighty would never condone taking your soul," I tell him. "If you think they're on Her side, you've made a terrible mistake."

"They didn't take anything from me. I gave it away."

"You gave away your *will*? Your freedom, your volition?" I think I'm going to be sick. "How could you make such a bargain?"

"What else did I have? What else was worth enough to sacrifice to God?"

"God doesn't want you to be a slave!"

"God wants me to be virtuous, and now I am nothing else."

This man's a mockery of everything I fought for and I will not abide him one second longer. I call my spear to hand as he fires.

Maybe I got sloppy, because I expected a bullet. I can dodge bullets. But what he fired was light, and light moves as fast as I do.

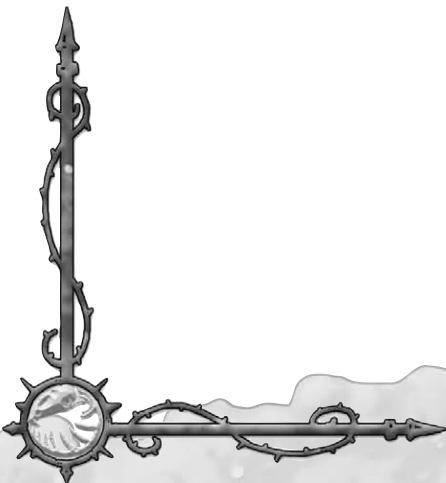
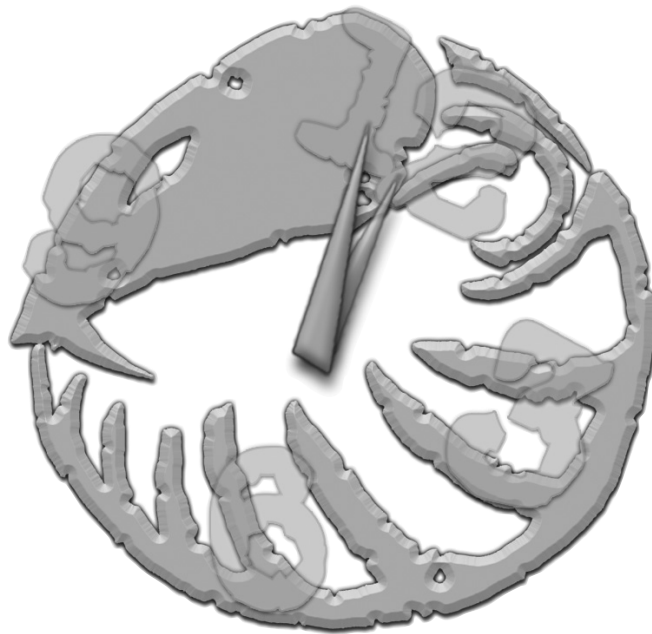
I hurl my weapon through his throat. His shot takes me through the right shoulder. It's a beam of purity and I *feel* it.

Pleasure.

It courses through me, the warming regard of love, the first movement of the universe, the nurturing energy of the Most Holy.

I am awash in bliss. I taste God's will and realize that She will forgive me, even me, if I only repent.

I have never been so insulted in all my life







INTRODUCTION

THE END OF ALL THINGS

Cataclysm. Annihilation. Armageddon. The end of the world goes by many names. A different fate is foreseen by every culture that anticipates and fears absolute destruction. In the World of Darkness, more than just human societies look to and wonder at the last days. Inhuman monsters and supernatural entities exist in secret, working their own agendas from behind the scenes. They are no less speculative of or frightened by the prospect of the end. In fact, their often otherworldly identity affords them uncanny insight into the fabric of reality and the universe. They anticipate and dread Judgment Day, because they foresee what it might entail. Whereas ordinary people can just guess and worry, supernatural entities can see and know.

These extraordinary denizens have good reason to be afraid. They sense the truth. The end of the world is here!

World of Darkness: Time of Judgment is the fourth sourcebook dedicated to the finale of the World of Darkness. It follows **Gehenna**, **Apocalypse** and

Ascension, focusing on how the setting might end for the remaining Storyteller games. Those include **Changeling: The Dreaming**, **Demon: The Fallen**, **Hunter: The Reckoning**, **Kindred of the East** and **Mummy: The Resurrection**. Like **Vampire**, **Werewolf** and **Mage**, these lesser-known but no less important lines come to a close and demand attention in the last days. Sure, vampires, shapechangers and mages have their own take on the end times, but so do the fae, damned, imbued, Kuei-jin and Amenti. Those views and voices also need to be heard.

Thus is the premise of **World of Darkness: Time of Judgment**. This single book addresses the end for five different game lines, each with its own chapter. As with all the Judgment books, we offer ideas on how each of the supernatural “races” might be affected by utter cataclysm or redemption. The conditions of demon existence may change at the end, for example, altering everything the damned have come to know and expect of their existence. The rules can all change in the last days on two

levels: in the setting and in game systems. Possession of hosts might be altered inexplicably as the forces of the universe shift momentum. Human bodies might spontaneously expel their invaders. Or acquiring hosts could become easier than ever for would-be possessors, with the absence or frailty of the human spirit no longer required for demons. These setting-based cosmological shifts may mean new game rules for demonic possession and for what the damned are capable of at the end. Now imagine those same possibilities across all the games.

But this single book does more than just show how its games' cosmologies and rules can be altered. It presents a host of suggestions and story ideas for how the world can end for demons, hunters, changelings, Kuei-jin and Amenti. At no point does White Wolf say, "This is how your chronicle must end." We give you and your troupe choices on how to resolve things, from absolute destruction to the salvation of the world and the turning of a new age. If you want, your chronicle can stop with a punctuation mark or it can continue on to new horizons that you create. It's your game. You get to decide the exact nature of its fate and the role your characters play in it.

We've created this book with the best of the best ideas and information on how the various lines can close. The results are succinct and powerful concepts and tools for your Judgment chronicle. Suggestions and plot points that will surprise, terrify and invigorate characters and players. We want each of these games to end on a high note, and the format of this book lets us do just that. We get right to the point, and we hope you appreciate the results.

Chapter 1, "Endless Winter" for **Changeling**, focuses on the possibilities of the fae returning to the Dreaming, or on chimerical death as the banality of the world overwhelms all. And yet, solitary changelings could survive the demise of imagination and seek new realms, either in this world or beyond.

Chapter 2, "Agents of Apocalypse" for **Demon**, addresses the very fate of Creation as the beings that gave shape to the universe decide its fate. Can humanity survive a war of would-be gods, or is human nature all that can prevail in the form of redeemed angels in mortal guise?

Chapter 3, "Inherit the Earth" for **Hunter**, explores the possibility that the imbued might find hope for humanity as they face the world's monsters, once and for all. Different fates lie ahead depending on the path hunters follow, whether it's open war, forgiveness or making dreams a reality.

Chapter 4, "Interesting Times" for **Kindred of the East**, looks at the high-action possibilities of the Yama

Kings' rise. The Sixth Age arrives, marking destruction in the world's cycle. Will the Demon Lords cause utter ruin and preside forever, or can the Kuei-jin rise up to usher in a new Spring?

Chapter 5, "Armageddon" for **Mummy**, reveals the hope that the Amenti offer the world at its greatest moment of need. Perhaps Apophis and the forces of destruction can be defeated, preserving a reality in which the Undying may thrive — or for which they must sacrifice themselves.

REFERENCES

World destruction and sweeping change have been the focus of imagination and faith since the dawn of humanity. In the modern day, we express concepts of fate, destiny and karma in fiction, movies and comics. The following are sources from which you can draw themes, imagery or simply inspiration for your Judgment chronicle. Some of these references apply to particular game lines addressed in this book, but some can be turned to all the games of the World of Darkness.

George Romero's *Trilogy of the Dead*. *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead* all essentially portray a world where monsters (in this case zombies) are responsible for the apocalypse. It's a gory, gritty, horrific series pitting man against wave after wave of ceaseless undead.

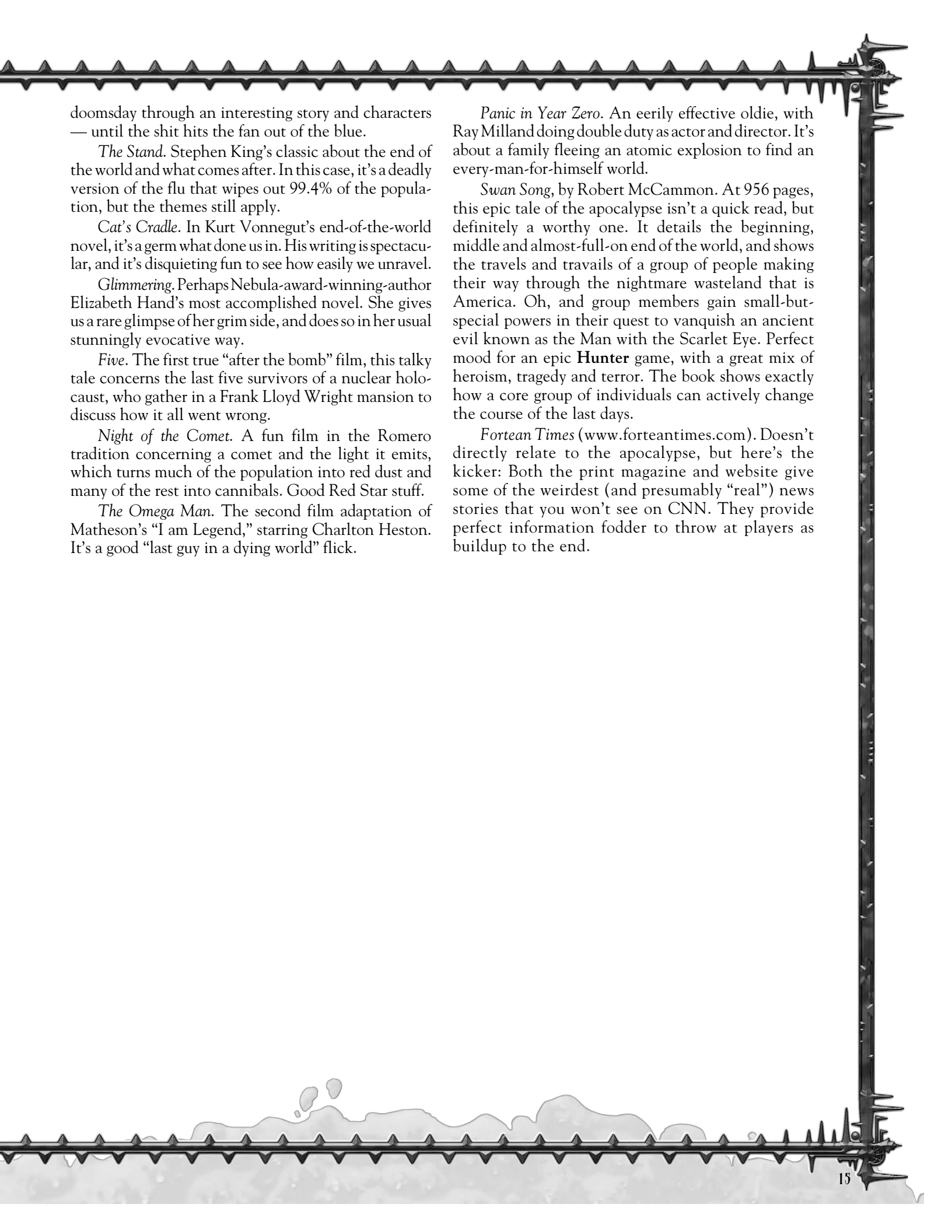
28 Days Later. Jim wakes up from a coma to discover that civilization seems to have been destroyed thanks to a man-made virus. This one doesn't necessarily turn everyone into zombies, but victims do become raving killers. It's kill or be killed, with hope for salvation in one ending.

The Rapture. A film starring Mimi Rogers and David Duchovny. Rogers plays a woman who leads a hedonistic life until she hears whispers of the "coming end" — specifically the Rapture, when the Christian faithful will be carried to Heaven. She becomes a Christian fundamentalist, but doesn't invest actual faith in it, and the apocalypse comes knocking. While the movie doesn't portray a man-versus-monster theme, it does convey a spot-on catastrophic mood, complete with a slow, eerie build-up and a Judgment Day ending.

Neverwhere, by Neil Gaiman. A perfect source of inspiration for **Changeling**, one that even faces the protagonist with the choice of leaving the terrifying wonder behind or becoming immersed in it.

The Neverending Story. The Nothing is eating the world, and it all comes down to remembering a name.

Until the End of the World. An ideal example of building up events to world annihilation. But in this case the audience is tricked into forgetting all about



doomsday through an interesting story and characters — until the shit hits the fan out of the blue.

The Stand. Stephen King's classic about the end of the world and what comes after. In this case, it's a deadly version of the flu that wipes out 99.4% of the population, but the themes still apply.

Cat's Cradle. In Kurt Vonnegut's end-of-the-world novel, it's a germ what done us in. His writing is spectacular, and it's disquieting fun to see how easily we unravel.

Glimmering. Perhaps Nebula-award-winning-author Elizabeth Hand's most accomplished novel. She gives us a rare glimpse of her grim side, and does so in her usual stunningly evocative way.

Five. The first true "after the bomb" film, this talky tale concerns the last five survivors of a nuclear holocaust, who gather in a Frank Lloyd Wright mansion to discuss how it all went wrong.

Night of the Comet. A fun film in the Romero tradition concerning a comet and the light it emits, which turns much of the population into red dust and many of the rest into cannibals. Good Red Star stuff.

The Omega Man. The second film adaptation of Matheson's "I am Legend," starring Charlton Heston. It's a good "last guy in a dying world" flick.

Panic in Year Zero. An eerily effective oldie, with Ray Milland doing double duty as actor and director. It's about a family fleeing an atomic explosion to find an every-man-for-himself world.

Swan Song, by Robert McCammon. At 956 pages, this epic tale of the apocalypse isn't a quick read, but definitely a worthy one. It details the beginning, middle and almost-full-on end of the world, and shows the travels and travails of a group of people making their way through the nightmare wasteland that is America. Oh, and group members gain small-but-special powers in their quest to vanquish an ancient evil known as the Man with the Scarlet Eye. Perfect mood for an epic **Hunter** game, with a great mix of heroism, tragedy and terror. The book shows exactly how a core group of individuals can actively change the course of the last days.

Fortean Times (www.forteanimes.com). Doesn't directly relate to the apocalypse, but here's the kicker: Both the print magazine and website give some of the weirdest (and presumably "real") news stories that you won't see on CNN. They provide perfect information fodder to throw at players as buildup to the end.



CHAPTER 1

CHANGELING: THE DREAMING “ENDLESS WINTER”

“They are not mad, or rather, the loss of their sanity is the lesser of their problems. It is worse than madness. They will tell you, if you let them: they are the ones who live, each day, in the wreckage of their dreams.

And if the sweeper of dreams leaves you, he will never come back.”

— Neil Gaiman, “The Sweeper of Dreams”

The Day True Thomas Lost His Voice


It was a cold day when True Thomas lost his voice. I know. I was there, and I’ll tell the story to you straight. Ceridwen is my name, and I’m renowned from sea to shining sea for... well, for a lot of things, including my stunning good looks, witty song stylings and impeccable choice of companions. I mean, really, there’s no better guy in the entire world than True Thomas, even if he is as mute as Helen Keller now. Anyway, a pooka couldn’t ask for a better friend, so I’ve made a vow to set the record straight since he can’t talk and say it himself. This is what happened, and I swear on a stack of Bibles that it’s all true.

Like I said, it was a cold winter’s day, and a bunch of us wilders were sick to death of being cooped up inside the freehold with nothing to do but lessons. I mean, really, what’s the use of learning sword fighting if you never get to go out into the world and use it? None, that’s what I say. I ought to know, because I’m the only one with enough guts to sneak out at night and test my skills. One night, I snuck out and defeated this knight dude. He was all snazzed up in this sparkly armor, but I changed into a fox, and—

Oh, yeah. I’m supposed to be telling you the story about Tommy, aren’t I? Sorry. I got a little carried away there.

So, anyway, it was cold. I told you that part already, right? We wilders begged to go into town and just hang out for a while and have some fun. There was this guy who went to the local high school — his name was Andy — and he and I really had some good times together. I kinda wanted to hook up with him and maybe get some Glamour out of it. I mean, we’re supposed to practice harvesting Glamour from mortals just in case we get caught away from a freehold, right? I was just doing what I was told. It wasn’t like I really liked the guy or anything.

Finally, the powers that be said we could leave the freehold, but only if we got somebody to go with us. It’s not like we’re childlings or anything, and maybe we got into a little bit of trouble last time we went into town, but I swear to God that old dude lit his own hair on fire. So we were stuck with a guardian, and I figured we might as well ask Tommy, because out of all the adults, he’s one of the coolest. He’d let us go and just hang out without hovering over our shoulders. Tommy might be an oldster, but he remembers what it was like to be young. So I went to ask him myself, because, like I said, we’re so tight and he probably would have said no to anybody else. But he



said yes to me, because we're the best of buds, and finally our seclusion was ended and we could go into town. It was about time, because if I didn't get out of there soon, I was going to go mad.

When I went to Tommy's room, I knew something was wrong. I know people always say that after something goes all to hell, and they're lying through their teeth, but I mean it seriously. I knew there was something wrong with him, because he was just sitting there, staring at the wall. There wasn't even a picture on it to look at, just a blank wall. And man, was it cold in there! He hadn't even bothered to light a fire! Lord knows how long he'd been sitting there in that freezing-cold room without a fire, and with no shoes on. That freehold has some majorly cold stone floors. I'm always suggesting some kind of central-heating system, but no one ever listens to me.

It took me a few minutes to get Tommy's attention, and I had to ask him a couple times to take us into town. He just didn't seem himself. Usually he's sort of kind, but gruff at the same time. You know what kind of guy I mean? But he wasn't anything like that, and he would have walked out of the room barefoot if I didn't remind him to put some shoes on. Then he laughed at himself, but it sounded kind of hollow, and I made him bend down, so I could feel his forehead because I thought he might be sick. He wasn't.

So, if you think I'm making that whole thing up about knowing something was wrong that day, you can stuff it up your behind and light it, because I checked his forehead for a fever before anything ever happened. I know it and Tommy knows it, and I get real offended because people never believe me. It's some kind of weird conspiracy or something.

What? Oh, I'll finish the story. Into town we went. Tommy sat at the coffee shop and had one of those espressos. They taste like crap! I went in with him one day and had one, and he kept correcting my pronunciation because I was calling it "expresso" instead of "espresso." In my opinion, they should just call it crap, because that's what it tastes like, and it's easier to pronounce. So anyway, Tommy spent his time in the coffee shop. He didn't do anything special as far as I know.

Still, something really weird happened while we were in town. I ought to tell you about it, because it's related to what happened with Tommy. We met up with some of the kids from the high school. They wanted to get out of their houses as much as we wanted to get out of the freehold. Andy was there, too. He brought a bunch of garbage bags, and we went sledding down Miller's Hill, showing off doing tricks. Each trick had to be better than the last, so even though it started off kind of lame, like with a couple of guys going down the hill backward, it got wild.

There was this girl there. It wasn't me, because I'd never do something dumb like this. Anyway, she thought it would be cool to use a cantrip to do a stunt that nobody

could beat. Besides, maybe if she amazed everybody, there would be some Glamour for the taking. Really, it's not a bad idea, and I should know, because I mentioned it to her, but I wasn't going to do it myself because it could be dangerous. If I got myself killed, who would be the voice of reason among all these crazy kids? So I made the suggestion to this girl, and she thought it was a good one.

Now, in case you've never been down Miller's Hill, there's one thing you should know. The left side is the baby side. It's all smooth and sleek, and although there's a couple of patches of ice, it's pretty much smooth sailing. That's the side you want to go down if you're going to do something fancy, because there aren't any bumps. The right side, though, is all uneven, and the whole thing is just one sheet of ice. Even if you're having second thoughts on the way down, you can't stop.

So this girl decides that she's going to go down the right side, and when she hits one of those bumps, she's going to cast a Hopscotch and aim herself right into the branches of this big oak tree that stands near the edge of the hill. To the mortals, it'll look like she hit that bump just right and vaulted into the tree.

She shoots off down the hill, and she's gathering up speed, and as she's going over those bumps, she's casting the cantrip. Only, something doesn't feel right. She told me about it later in plenty of detail, so I can describe it exactly for you. She said that it was like reaching real hard for something that's just at your fingertips. Like the Dreaming suddenly moved about five feet farther away. Now, I think we've all had those times when we try to access the Dreaming, but we screw up, or maybe the place that we're in is just so dead that we can't manage to call on it. But it wasn't like that, she said. This girl knew in her heart that she did it all right, but for some reason the Glamour just wasn't working.

The other wilders noticed it, too. I mean, even I noticed it. I could feel her trying to do a cantrip (of course, I expected it, because it was my idea in the first place), and it felt like the Dreaming just slowed down around us for a minute. I felt like my mortal side was running at normal speed, and my fae side was moving through Jell-o. I can't even begin to explain how strange it was.

You can imagine what happened next. She was going too fast to stop when she realized that her cantrip wasn't going to work, and like I told you before, that hill is just a big stretch of ice. She couldn't stop. The best she could do was twist around so she hit the tree with her side, and after she whacked into it, a bunch of snow fell off the branches and totally covered her. So we dug her out, and she's just wailing like a banshee because her arm's broken in about three different places, not to mention having snow down her jacket, and suddenly the game isn't so much fun any more. I looked back at the hill, and a chill went down my spine that had nothing to do with the

snow. I couldn't see it in the Dreaming. It was like it wasn't even there. No hill at all. Just a big bunch of nothing. It was the scariest thing I've ever saw.

So the mortals went back to their houses and we took the girl back, too. We all agreed that something was up on that hill, and maybe we'd better take a look at it sometime. Still, it's kind of funny that a sledding hill, where kids play all the time, would suddenly become so stagnant. It was like something that's been there your whole life is suddenly just dead and gone. It just disappears, and you don't realize how horrible it is without it until it's just too late.

So we go back and get Tommy, and he takes us to the hospital to get that girl's arm checked out. While we're waiting, Tommy takes us all inside and gets us each a hot chocolate. He asks us what happened, and we explain the whole thing, only we can't quite find the words to tell how it felt being so close yet so far from the Dreaming. It just wasn't like anything any of us had ever felt before, even though I have to admit that I'm usually pretty smart about those sorts of things.

Tommy sat there real quiet after we were done, and then asked us to take him out to the hill. A couple of the wilders were worried because we had a curfew, but Tommy and I reassured them that as long as we were on important business they couldn't punish us for staying out late.

Back to the hill we trudged, and it was colder than before. It was so cold that I almost went foxy just so I could wear the fur, but I was kind of scared to do it. I mean, if cantrips weren't going to work, maybe I might not be able to change back. I'd be stuck as a fox forever, and if some mountain lion came down and tried to eat me, there wouldn't be anything I could do but run. To be honest, I didn't want to go back there, but I didn't really have any choice now, did I?

Tommy stared at the hill for a long time, and my feet started to freeze. Finally, he stopped looking and turned to us, and we all gasped, because he'd turned this nasty gray color. We figured it was the cold, because like I said before, he is an oldster even if he is kind of cool. So we hustled him back home and sat down in front of the fire to warm up. Only Tommy wouldn't stay in the main hall. He wanted to go somewhere and think, he said. I was kind of worried that he wouldn't remember to light his fire again, so I follow him back up to his room and did it for him. So he just sat there and stared at the wall again, only this time he was mumbling. I don't even think he realized it, but he just kept mumbling, and I heard the word "end" and "winter," and my heart just about stopped.

I mean, everybody knows that Tommy is the best expert on lore that there is, and he knows the meaning of just about everything. Everybody says so, and it's the truth. If anybody else started mumbling about stuff like that, I'd probably have thought they went batty. But with Tommy, it was enough to scare me pretty good, and even

though I tried to pretend I wasn't worried, it was hard until I realized he was probably playing a trick on me. I'd played a few pranks on him, too. This one time, I took all of the buttons off his clothes and sewed them back on, only on the inside. He had a real tough time getting dressed until he finally realized what I'd done, and it was pretty funny. This was a pretty good way to get back at me, and I chuckled at myself for falling for it.

That night, we went to court. Yawnsville. It's not like we had any choice, because with all the visitors to the court during the holiday season, we were stuck there most nights. And the worst part was that Protocol was in effect, so we couldn't be rowdy. I have to tell you, if anybody ever captures me and wants me to spill all my secrets, all they need to do is put me in court for a couple of days. I'll say anything they want to get out of there!

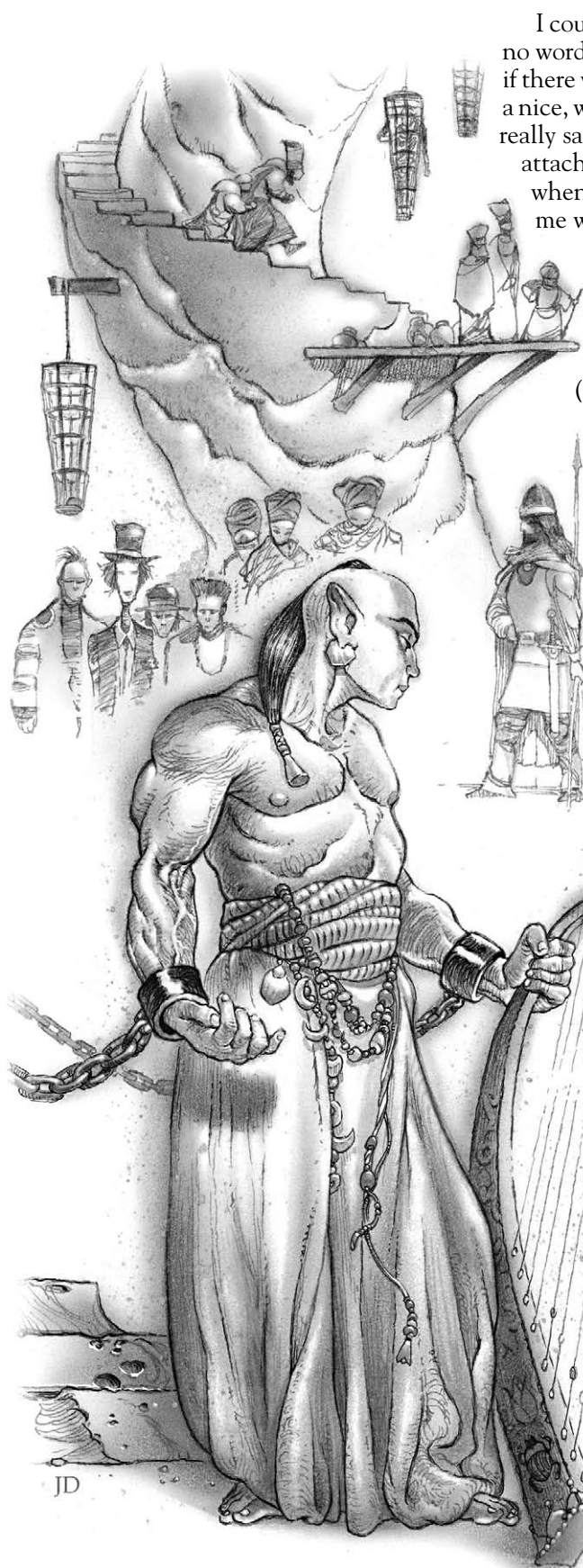
Once I decided it was just a prank, I felt better, although the prospect of going to court made me feel worse all over again. I didn't even see Tommy until the court business was over and Queen Mab called for a story. She had to call twice, which was kind of unusual, and finally Tommy came out with his harp in hand.

The minute I saw him, I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach, because I knew it wasn't a prank at all. He was so gray and shrunken that he almost looked like a sluagh. He just stood there and blinked, absentmindedly strumming the strings of his harp. I wanted to burst out and tell everyone what happened that afternoon, but fear of that dratted Protocol kept me silent. There really wasn't anything I could do but stand and watch it all happen.

Tommy finally opened his mouth, and what he had to say was completely unexpected. He looked at the queen, right into her eyes, and said, "It is ended. There are no more stories to tell," and then he shut his mouth and wouldn't open it again.

The queen was a little angry, because she'd asked for a song and the bard wouldn't give it to her. But she kept her temper in check, which is a talent I taught her myself, because she always was a little hotheaded, and I knew how much that bothered her. So she asked him for the story of the forging of Anweyth, or the story of the crowning of High King David, but he just shook his head sadly and strummed his harp. Then, she got really hopping mad and ordered him to sing, but he wouldn't utter a peep. And all the while, I'm standing there wondering if I should speak up and tell someone about that afternoon, because obviously something happened on that hill, and shouldn't Tommy be able to live out his last days before the Endless Winter in the open air? I mean, if this is the end, why are we wasting our time yelling at each other like idiots?

But I never had time to interfere. Before I knew it, the queen had Tommy clapped in chains and sent to the dungeon to rethink his decision. The whole court murmured as they led True Thomas out of the grand hall, Protocol or no Protocol.



I couldn't sleep that night. When I went to bed, there was still no word from Tommy, and I finally sneaked down and asked him if there was anything I could do to help. At least they'd put him in a nice, warm cell without any rats or anything in there. Still, it was really sad to see him like that, curled up on his bed with a chain attached to his ankle, still strumming that harp. He came over when I called his name, and tried to smile at me. It kind of made me want to cry.

I asked him a bunch of questions that night, and Tommy never even said a word. I asked him if he wanted me to help him with anything, and he shook his head no. I asked him if he wanted me to talk to the queen about what happened at the hill, and he shrugged. (I told her about it anyway, not like it did any good. She really was mad, and I think Tommy knew she would be.) I asked him why he wouldn't just tell a story, and he gave a helpless little shrug. I did just about everything short of standing on my head to get him to talk to me, and he never said a word. Finally, I asked him the question that worried me most.

"Tommy," I asked, "Can you talk at all?"

He shook his head no, and the sinking feeling in my stomach told me he was telling the truth. Tommy couldn't tell a story because he couldn't talk at all, and my spider senses told me that the Dreaming had something to do with it. I offered to go on a quest, to donate Glamour, to do anything I could think of to help him get

his voice back. He just gave me a resigned shrug that said there was nothing I could do. I sat there in the dark for a while. I have to admit that I felt pretty miserable. The queen was going to keep Tommy there until he told a story, and he couldn't do it even if he wanted to. He'd probably be stuck down there until the very end, and there wasn't a damned thing I could do about it. I don't know how long we sat there, but finally I heard the guards coming on their nightly rounds. I knew I'd better get out of there, but I couldn't resist one more question.

"Tommy," I whispered, "Is Winter really coming?"

He couldn't answer, of course, but I could see that he was crying, and that was all the answer I needed.

There aren't any stories left to tell, because the Endless Winter is coming — and Tommy and I are the only ones who know. I've been trying to tell everyone, to warn them, to get them to stand up and do something, only no one will listen. They think it's another prank, but they don't know me very well. I'll joke about a lot of things, but Endless Winter isn't one of them. Maybe I'm just a pooka. Maybe I'm not one of those Red Branch knights, but I swear on the Dreaming that I'll stop it all from happening or I'll die trying. After that, I'm taking Tommy out for an espresso. Even though they taste like crap.

Introduction

How do you end a dream?

For better or (much more frequently) worse, the shadowy denizens of the World of Darkness see the end of all things as a time when great mysteries will at last be made plain. The outcome of the events surrounding the end will be clear for all with eyes to see them. But as with many other things, the fae differ from their Prodigal cousins. Even their most common apocalyptic myth, the coming of Winter, is seldom considered an overt time of rampant suffering and destruction. Indeed, some fae argue that it may come to pass with the world as a whole little the wiser.

Since their earliest days, changelings' most powerful and vital struggle has not been fighting physical foes or a grand metaphysical concept such as death or corruption, but keeping alive such fragile notions as the innocence of children or the need for artists to express themselves. Likewise, changelings struggle with themselves to achieve balance between their human and faerie natures, to find a place in a world that is not their own. Theirs is often a bittersweet life, with fond memories and dear friends gradually stolen away by the cruel touch of Banality, their moments of greatest triumph tempered by the knowledge that their glories will fade one day.

This is not to say the fae are concerned only with intangible, delicate things. Far from it. Their history is long and colorful, full of great adventures and heroes that are far larger than life. In the end, the fae are as capable of decisive action and heroic deeds as any other group, but that's not all there is to them. Their battles are fought not only against monsters and villains, but against mediocrity. Triumphant over one half of the problem doesn't mean much if the other half remains.

The balance between worldly concerns and the grand concepts that shape the fae is immensely important when designing a proper end for the Kithain. If all they do is slay great beasts or perform ancient rituals, you've missed an important element of what makes them unique. Likewise, if you turn the game into little more than an exercise in artistic appreciation or applied sociology, you sell the dynamic and active heritage of the fae short.

After all, **Changeling** is ultimately a game about balance between the world of dreams we all aspire to achieve and the world of mundane concerns with which we all grapple. Make sure your stories address both sides of the Kithain and you will find players responding on levels that are rare in other games.

Dream on!

Metaplot

In the interests of ensuring that everyone is on the same page as the end approaches, what follows is a very brief summary of the **Changeling** metaplot up to this point.

Once upon a time, a young noble David Ardry was discovered by True Thomas, legendary bard of the fae, and eventually crowned high king of Concordia. To the surprise of many nobles and commoners alike, he proved to be a just and fair king, ruling for many years of relative peace and prosperity. Several years ago he fell in love with Faerilyth, a beautiful princess of House Eiluned and the niece of King Meilge. They were married amid a cloud of suspicion about the purity of Faerilyth's affection, a cloud that darkened when David went missing while on tour with his new wife through her home, the Kingdom of Willows. Sir Seif, a young eshu knight, suddenly found himself in possession of Caliburn, the sword of the high king, and took it as a sign that he should set out to find David. Seif vanished in turn.

Without David to sustain it, the peace between nobles and commoners shattered into open revolt, along with a vicious multi-partite struggle for the throne among different factions of nobles and the commoners loyal to them.

Now, the main contenders for power are Faerilyth, still high queen and desperately searching for her husband; Princess Lenore ap Dougal, once named heir by David himself; Queen Mab, ruler of the lands surrounding Tara-Nar, who refuses to relinquish the palace to anyone but David; and Morwen, David's sister and a favorite of the commoners. Rumor also has it that Meilge himself has his eye on the throne. In the background, the insidious Shadow Court sets all sides against each other, reveling in the chaos. Complicating matters further, a number of noble houses have recently returned from Arcadia, bringing ominous tidings with them. No one faction has achieved dominance and the war drags on, each day bringing new tales of heroism and honor — as well as bloodshed and brutality.

Meanwhile, in the depths of the Dreaming the courts of the Fomorians, the ancient enemies of the Kithain and their ancestors the Tuatha de Danaan have awoken. The Fomorians' lowest order, the White Court, has escaped imprisonment and seeks ways to release its more powerful masters. Thallain, dark reflections of the Kithain, have begun to return to earth as well, along with the adhene, bizarre dwellers of the Dreaming that have not set foot in the Autumn World for centuries. Several groups on both sides of the Dreaming have begun to search for the Triumph Casque of Sorrows, the legendary weapon that was instrumental in defeating the Fomorians during the last great war. While the treasure has been lost for ages, if one side can find prize, it can virtually guarantee victory.

It is on this volatile and fractious stage that we find our heroes.

Buildup

Endless Winter.

For millennia, the fae have whispered of this terrible time, when Glamour is snuffed out, Banality triumphs and the Dreaming itself dies. Even darker accounts speak of the Fomorians rising up to usher in a hellish new age of shadow and tyranny, in which these elder monsters rule fae and mortal alike with absolute power and cruelty.

Legends about this terrible apocalypse — and, some insist, the Spring that must follow — figure prominently in the histories of all kith, cutting across geographic boundaries and even uniting Seelie and Unseelie in speculation, supposition and dread.

Of course, thinking about Endless Winter and what it might entail doesn't really prepare any of the fae for what lies ahead. As consumed as they are with unraveling ancient prophecies and deciphering cryptic metaphors, the most astute scholars may fail to see the actual signs of the coming disaster.

Building up to your personal end scenario is critical to its success. It's no fun if the motley wakes up one morning, and gosh-darn-it the Fomorians have risen and laid waste to Concordia. No matter what kind of direction you ultimately want your chronicle to take, or how much of a chance the characters have to escape what's coming, none of it will seem real or dramatic unless it's contrasted to the "ordinary" lives the characters knew before.

It's not necessary to include any or all of the following factors as part of a buildup to unleashing horror on your players, but you may find them useful to establish an important plot point or to underscore the drastic changes afoot. For convenience, these elements of foreshadowing have been grouped along the lines of relatively minor or inconsequential phenomena, more serious incidents, and at last the most dramatic and obvious signs that the end is here.

Foreshadowing: Thunder in the Night

Even the most direct and disastrous scenarios involving Endless Winter should involve quiet buildup. Small signs and sweeping omens combine to paint a picture of what's to come. A character has nightmares before the events of the end times unfold. This is the moment of hesitation before entering the darkest heart of the forest, when something just isn't *right*, yet there's no choice but to go onward.

The Red Star

In 1999, a new astrological phenomenon appeared in the heavens, visible only to the fae and their Prodigal cousins — a glaring red star. Soon dubbed the Eye of Balor by the fae, its crimson light inspires dread and apprehension in all who gaze upon it, a morbid fascination made no less gripping by the fact that the star's light is rumored to grow brighter during times of war, disaster and suffering.

Exactly what does the appearance of the Eye of Balor signify? While certain scenarios have a specific purpose for it in mind, you have complete control over what it means in your chronicle. It could be an omen of doom or a sign of the return of the Tuatha de Danaan. The fact that it gives the Kithain an ominous feeling doesn't

necessarily mean it has evil connotations. Any period of significant change is bound to inspire a certain amount of unease, even if the ultimate result is positive. Ultimately, the best use for the eye is as reinforcement for the atmosphere you seek in your end scenario. Few things are as effective in establishing mood as an astrological omen glaring down on the characters, day and night.

Prophecy Fails


This simple yet hair-raising technique involves the utter and absolute failure of all attempts at divining the future, whether through use of the Soothsay Art, scrying treasures or any other means, including the prophetic talents of gifted mortals and Prodigals. All attempts to see the future fail automatically, regardless of the talent of the seer or the power of the treasure. Such efforts reveal nothing but blackness, as though the future is totally obscured — or that there is no future whatsoever. (Of course, if you desire a particular image or series of images to be central to your end scenario, you may simply choose to use those visions and no others as a means of foreshadowing.) Repeated attempts may even damage an observer's sanity as she tries to comprehend a mystery that a single mind is not meant to understand.

Errant Trods

As the Dreaming sickens and writhes, trods once familiar and reliable become increasingly unstable and dangerous. Those fae with a grasp of Dream-Craft find their talents tested to the limit. Those without that rare and valuable Art are essentially at the mercy of the Dreaming as to where they wind up, regardless of where a trod usually leads. While the Silver Path remains as inviolate as ever, travelers of the Dreaming find even this road almost completely obscured by the surrounding terrain, as though the land itself actively seeks to lead travelers astray. At other times, the path appears to fragment into hundreds of apparently identical roads, daring wayfarers to make the wrong choice and be swallowed by the Dreaming. Perhaps worst of all, sometimes fae believe they are following the Silver Path correctly, only to find themselves on a Black Path to the Underworld, a Green Path to a former Fomorian stronghold, or on some other twisted or ill-used road.

Dreams Deferred

At first it might seem a fairly humble concept next to some of the more dramatic signs of Winter's approach, but never forget that grave threats and disturbances to the Dreaming are reflected on the sleep cycles of the world. And not just the Kithain are affected. Prodigals and mortals suffer when the Dreaming is thrown out of balance, though they may not easily guess the cause of their distress. In scenarios in which the Dreaming is dying or retreating from the Autumn World, it becomes harder to get restful sleep. The resulting epidemic of



insomnia and related conditions adds to the ever-increasing sense of desperation that haunts the world in its final days. Beyond producing little Glamour, all living beings go mad if denied sleep for too long. That condition can add a frantic and semi-hallucinatory edge to games in which sleep is ever harder to come by.

Conversely, some Dreamers and other inspired individuals sleep more and find it harder and harder to wake as the Dreaming slides into disarray. It's almost as if the Dreaming draws upon every last ounce of Glamour that it can get... or that it grants its favorite children mercy as it all comes crashing down.

Imminent Change: The Rising Storm

These phenomena are clearly out of the ordinary, even for beings as used to the strange and unusual as the Kithain. Many of them go from merely curious or slightly disturbing to outright dangerous for the unwary, and can cause serious problems for changelings caught in their path. Mortal society changes more noticeably, though still not to the extent of faerie society. At this point, even the most obstinate or skeptical fae must admit that *something* is going on. The paranoid or superstitious are likely to be beside themselves with fright.

Cantrips in Flux

As the Dreaming destabilizes, cantrips become increasingly unpredictable. Fading contact with the Dreaming makes even the most potent invocations little more than shadows of their former selves. Bunks become more numerous and demanding to perform, while bestowing less power. Under the most extreme circumstances, cantrips cost additional Glamour to cast even if the caster fulfills the usual (or increased) requirements. Areas of high Banality become "dead magic" zones, where cantrips are difficult or outright impossible to perform. Worse still, Autumn People and other highly banal souls radiate "dead magic" zones, making them high-unassailable with the tools of Glamour.

Conversely, unpredictable surges of Glamour might generate results reminiscent of the mythic past, to the surprise and perhaps regret of casters. A pooka attempting to use Quicksilver to avoid a pursuing gang of redcaps might be caught in his accelerated state for hours or days, wreaking havoc on his metabolism and making it impossible to perform delicate tasks or interact with the normal world without incurring heavy doses of Banality. Likewise, a sidhe attempting to command one of her retinue with Sovereign might squash all of his free will, leaving a near-mindless automaton that exists only to obey.

Shallowings

As a prelude to the weakening of the Mists themselves, fae are confronted by an increasing number of "shallowings," incidents in which the Autumn World

and Dreaming overlap, often without warning. Although these incidents begin in remote regions, they quickly spread to affect even the most heavily urban areas, causing panic for denizens of both realms.

Indeed, these incidents are exceedingly dangerous for both sides. Chimera and other elements native to the Dreaming are confronted by levels of Banality that they are unable to withstand, while mortals and even the occasional Prodigal is trapped in a world beyond imagination, without any way to get home again. (And this is to say nothing of the problems caused by, say, a manticore appearing in Central Park, or a group of children becoming lost in a Nightmare Realm.) Without Kithain or other capable beings around to sort out the problems and find some way to return "accidental tourists," most do not survive long in their new worlds, making it a problem of particular urgency.

Tabloid Life

At this stage, humanity recognizes that something is wrong and consciously confronts the truth of the matter. Life takes on a slightly surreal or tabloid quality for many mortals. Reputable news outlets showcase an increasing number of stories about UFO sightings, Bigfoot and alien abductions. Devout mortals hear more and more talk of miracles and visions throughout their congregations. There's speculation that it all means Judgment Day is at hand. Even skeptical mortals are inclined to be interested in talk of an end, as though the subconscious mind is aware of something the conscious mind can't admit.

Fantastic reports are not limited to the nightly news or to the ranks of the faithful. Scientists puzzle over strange phenomena such as bizarre atmospheric patterns, odd wildlife behavior and rising trends of mental illness and instability. Police struggle with a rise of missing children, runaways, school violence and gang fights as more Kithain are convinced of what is really happening and become active in their local politics and regions, all thinly veiled behind mundane concerns.

While the vast majority of stories are filtered through the Mists and through the minds of the people who witness events, particularly clever or insightful Kithain may be able to piece together what actually happens, or even glimpse the larger forces at work by studying enough reports.

Judgment Has Come: The Storm Breaks

At this point, there's no mistaking what's taking place. Even the most naïve fae know at a glance that great changes are underway. While not every fae believes in tales of Endless Winter, chances are that even the skeptical question their convictions as powerful events sweep the land. Mortal society is noticeably different, with public panics, religious fervor and rising crime all evident as the situation with the Dreaming becomes dire.

The Death of the New

Never forget that while they may be directly influenced by the departure of Glamour, the fae are most certainly not the only ones who suffer when the energy of creativity drains from the world. With the withdrawal of the Dreaming's presence, the spark that drives the creation of true art fades. It may seem easy to dismiss this on the surface. (What real harm can come of a few frustrated artists?) But loss of anything innovative and new goes beyond the realm of just the arts.

The human capacity to devise anything original is lost, whether it's architecture, military tactics or criminal enterprise. Even individuals without much creative inclination suffer as they rely wholly on the creations of others to help them experience emotional catharsis. Without any outlets to express pent-up emotions or ideas, feelings of frustration and anger arise, slowly at first, and then to alarming levels as lack of originality becomes more and more evident. Violent crimes such as rape, murder and assault spiral out of control. The suicide rate leaps as hopeless souls give in to their own despair in the face of a bleak world.

Mortals at this stage are near panic constantly, and mob violence is frighteningly common. The more paranoid or sensitive among people intuitively sense that the world is ending. Kithain and Prodigals alike must tread carefully; even the kindest and most understanding people are on edge. Those human elements already inclined to do so have no compunction whatsoever about shedding blood or destroying property.

The Mists in Flux

Although the Mists are always something of a mixed blessing to the Kithain, clouding memories as they shield the fae from mortal eyes, this once reliable phenomenon turns unpredictable. In some instances, the Mists fail outright, exposing changelings to the mortal world, their fae miens clearly visible and their cantrips as obvious as an amateur magician's tricks. Without the Mists to shield the beautiful and fragile world of the Dreaming, naked exposure to the Autumn World is accompanied by crippling doses of Banality. Unlucky fae must seek shelter from the unforgiving eyes of the public until the Mists return to normal, assuming they ever do.

On the other end of the spectrum, some fae find the Mists grow too strong, essentially causing changelings to be ignored by mortals around them or shunting them into the Dreaming, cutting them off from the mortal world completely. Helpless fae walk the streets alone, unable to make the world acknowledge them. Their most direct attempts to gain notice result in sudden rushes of Banality as they push aside the Mists and reveal themselves in their true forms. Even then, as soon as a changeling leaves the immediate area, the Mists slide back as thick as ever and he is forgotten again, making lasting contact impossible during the fluctuation.

Troubles with the Mists intensify as time passes, the periods when they fall or strengthen growing longer and longer. Finally, Kithain are exposed to their worst enemy or enveloped and forgotten completely.

The Tithed Ones

No good deed goes unpunished, so they say, and every bargain with the Devil will one day have its due. While the commoner kith adopted human flesh long ago to hide from Banality, the recent return of the sidhe is abrupt (and according to some, insidious). When the sidhe return, they do not forge human disguises, but occupy mortal bodies outright. While the effects are superficially similar (amnesia, the struggle with Banality), the fact remains that the vast majority of sidhe are not the original owners of their bodies. Of course, nobles insist that this is an agreement reached willingly with hosts, often suggesting that the human soul is ushered to the paradise of Arcadia in exchange. And yet, the recent appearance of the foul and disturbing entities known as the Tithed Ones seems to suggest that a far darker exchange occurs.

At first, Tithed Ones attacks are little more than rumors and apparently coincidental happenings, easily mistaken for "ordinary" assassinations or vicious chimera incidents. Surviving nobles report harrowing encounters with utterly silent, black-clad attackers who wield weapons of ice, their faces disguised save for burning, hateful eyes. These strange beings apparently flow like shadows around most defenses, making them maddeningly elusive targets, yet when grappled they demonstrate the strength of a full-grown troll, tossing foes aside or cleaving through heavy armor. They evidently focus their efforts entirely on a particular sidhe, although they slay any who interfere.

Eventually, the terrible secret comes to light: These assailants are none other than the evicted souls of sidhe hosts, their faces twisted into hideous masks of hatred and their minds consumed with thoughts of revenge. Tithed Ones claim that the sidhe did not bargain with them, but cast their spirits into the darkest recesses of the Dreaming, stranding the souls in a hellish existence until freed. They do not reveal the identity of their "saviors," except that they are given the means to return to the world and the power to seek vengeance. Those skeptical of the Tithed Ones' identities find that the beings possess intimate knowledge of their former bodies and lives to a degree that defies refutation.

Of course, it's possible that these are little more than clever doppelgangers created by enemies of the Kithain (perhaps even the Fomorians themselves) in order to sow confusion and fear amid the fae. Or perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between, with some sidhe having made a devil's bargain while others were genuine. Regardless of what the ultimate truth might be, the Tithed Ones gather in ever greater numbers, eager for a chance to strike down the rulers of the Kithain. Despite the

hopes of such like-minded groups as the Urban Renewal League, the Tithed Ones refuse to play politics or make allegiances. They have their targets, and that is all that matters to them.

Direction

So now that you've seen a number of different ways to introduce the idea of the end times to your game, there come the equally important issues. Is everything really coming apart at the seams? Or is it still possible for the world to pull through, whole or in part? Will the approach of Endless Winter be something that leaves no Kithain or mortal unchanged, or will it be something that only a small portion of the populace is even aware of when it's over?

These may seem like odd questions to raise when discussing the "end of the world," but it's important not to get hung up on preconceived notions of how things must go for your world and game. The scenarios offered in this chapter are not written in stone. There's a great deal of space to interpret them to suit the kind of end you want. While not everything can be planned in advance — players have a wonderful way of throwing even the best-laid plans for a loop — you should definitely have an idea of where you see the overall setting going as the end runs its course.

Will it mean Long Winter for the fae, but humanity is largely left untouched? Do the characters have a chance to bring about a bright new Spring? (And if so, what are your plans for the "happily ever after" phase?) Will the Dreaming collapse, leaving the fae stranded on Earth and slowly starving for Glamour? Do horrific battles between fae and mortals ravage the globe after the Mists fall and the Dreaming is exposed? Even if you intend to make it possible for the characters to escape the worst of your particular scenario — such as finding a defensible, ever flowing Glamour spring around which to shelter — you must decide what happens to the rest of the world. Take your time and make sure you have a clear idea of what you want to see. Most of all, think of ways to bring home these great changes as vividly and powerfully as possible.

Remember that simply because you (and maybe your players) know the end is coming, the characters have no idea what lies in store. Armageddon has been "just around the corner" for ages, as seen in countless apocalyptic panics throughout history, and more recently with the hysteria surrounding the turn of the millennium. While events eventually reach a point at which even the most jaded and cynical must face what's going on, that doesn't mean your end has to be an open book. The most knowledgeable fae scholars can be oblivious to the impending end. All they can do is read the ancient prophecies, look at the signs they see around them, and make their best guess.



The State of the Dreaming

Perhaps the most important underlying factor in determining the severity and direction of your game's end is the shape of the Dreaming. Although the Dreaming is generally presented as slowly withering, its contact with the Autumn world fading more with each passing day, you don't have to use that model for your chronicle.

A Dying Dream

This is the traditional approach. The Dreaming diminishes, its power weakening and its children grow ever closer to extinction. Banality weighs heavily on the Kithain and their chimerical world, and the approach of Winter is all but assured. Shunned and dismissed by a world that no longer needs them, the fae quietly waste away from the sickness caused by the greatest indignity their proud race could ever endure: being utterly irrelevant.

This direction is excellent for showcasing scenarios in which the chimerical world receives its final judgment mostly or entirely away from the eyes of mortals and Prodigs. It's also well suited for bittersweet tales of loss and separation, as the essence of what makes the fae truly wonderful is gradually lost. Perhaps the characters are allowed one final moment of lucidity before their identities as children of the Dreaming are snuffed out forever... or perhaps not.

Glamour fading away doesn't necessarily mean that the Dreaming itself is destroyed. While many Kithain assume that the loss of Glamour on Earth triggers the destruction of the Dreaming, nothing says that has to be true. Even if you subscribe to the belief that humans forged the fae from their own primal dreams, that doesn't mean their creations can't acquire a life of their own. Changelings might be able to survive the rejection of their "parents." Perhaps Glamour does fade from the Autumn World forever, but continues to exist beyond the boundaries of its banal confines, forcing the fae to flee into the Dreaming or face extinction.

Blaze of Glory

The Dreaming of this premise refuses to lie down quietly in the face of Banality. While the damage done by the Shattering remains, the fae experience a surge of power as Glamour makes a final effort to remain a vital and potent force in the world. It might be enough to rekindle human belief in the fantastic, staving off Winter. Perhaps the upwelling brings on a new Spring, particularly if the Kithain take advantage of the opportunity in time. Even if it is ultimately a doomed expression of power, the results mark the world in ways that the long-suffering fae would have been hard-pressed to imagine before the end.

Fae in a chronicle that takes this direction may believe that a new Spring is indeed at hand. If that is your ultimate goal, it's still best to show characters that this

newfound power alone will not carry the world to a new age. If it was that simple to shake off Winter, the Dreaming could have done it long ago. While this surge may make it easier for characters to achieve their goals, a ready supply of Glamour does not ensure that the fae can guide the Autumn World back to belief. The hardest challenges must still be overcome by the fae themselves.

Naturally, bursts of Glamour pose their own potential dangers. Aside from the wild and unpredictable changes that are inherent to any powerful exposure to Glamour, the mortal world is unprepared to deal with the incursion of chimerical reality, and may strike back harshly if the fae aren't careful. While this direction presupposes a certain amount of "shielding" against the force of Banality, having the Mists fall or chimerical world suddenly overlap mundane reality is bound to elicit responses of fear and hostility — as well as wonder and amazement.

The Final Season

Very few legends detail exactly what the fae can expect in their end times. Although a Winter bereft of Glamour remains the most popular theory, especially considering the Banality of the world, that is far from the only theory. For every few doomsayers who predict an Endless Winter devoid of Glamour, one equally determined sage believes in a Spring of renewed connection to the Dreaming.

Understanding what these seasons mean to the fae, and how they manifest is essential to presenting an end that's true to Kithain legend. While the fae may not be aware of exactly where they stand until all is said and done, they should be able to look back and realize that the seasons have changed, if only because the characters are the last fae to recognize the outcome.


A Crown of Shadows

Many Kithain determined to prevent or at least better predict the end lose themselves in ancient texts or explorations of long-forgotten mystic realms. They're convinced that Winter can be prevented if they can only learn the right moldy incantations or find some ancient treasure that has the power to ward off the chill.

It hasn't occurred to them that Winter might just be invited in.

Following his orchestration of High King David's disappearance and the ensuing civil war, King Meilge employs his network of spies, agitators and assassins to fan the flames of war and weaken his opposition in the process. He uses his ward, the heartbroken High Queen Faerilyth, to shield himself from scrutiny.

Once the war drags on to the point of numbing atrocity and the fae of Concordia grow tired of bloodshed, Meilge uses his cunning Arts to convince Faerilyth to make such a demonstration of love and devotion that



none can contest her claim or the peace it offers. After Faerilyth rides this wave of approval back to Tara-Nar, Meilge carefully insinuates himself into the new regime, and then springs the final and most dangerous phase of his plan: The return of David, and the murder of Faerilyth at David's hands.

Following the defeat of David by a sinister champion, Meilge tearfully steps forward to assume the crown in honor of his fallen ward — and the Shadow Court owns the throne of Concordia, ensuring the arrival of the Long Winter.

Buildup

In contrast to some of the more overt and spectacular ends proposed in this chapter, the rise of Meilge is a relatively subdued, secretive scenario. A mastermind in every way, Meilge plans events down to the smallest detail. If characters have any hope of stopping him, they need the ability to swing a sword and cast a cantrip, but also sharp investigative skills, polished espionage talents and most of all the ability to survive in the cutthroat world of high-level politics.

Storytellers interested in building up to the events of this scenario shouldn't overlook the Kithain rumor mill. If the characters don't already suspect Meilge or Faerilyth of some wrongdoing, it's important to point them in that direction. Providing the characters with some background material on the major players of the scenario, as well as some increasingly disturbing clues as to Meilge's nefarious nature, is vital to creating an atmosphere of paranoia and mystery.

Of course, this is not to say that some of the more supernatural buildup elements discussed previously can't come into play as well. They might underscore the notion that all is not right with the royal façade, be increasingly urgent reminders of the dwindling time left to prevent Winter, or to just give characters a taste of what's to come. "The Red Star," "Dreams Deferred," "Prophecy Fails" and "Tabloid Life" are all relatively subtle yet evocative ways of conveying a sense of a world askew. The source of the unease isn't easily deciphered, though, and thus excellent for illustrating and elaborating on the layers of deception inherent to this scenario.

Ascension by Attrition

The opening act follows a particularly bloody and bitter series of battles during the Concordian civil war. Should war not yet have begun in your chronicle, it's possible to achieve the necessary sense of war-weariness simply by having simmering tensions erupt into a rapid series of extremely gory battles and/or heinous atrocities. (Most are carefully orchestrated by Meilge to inspire outrage and a desire for peace.) Chronicles already embroiled in the war can simply include such incidents as part of the ongoing story.

Should the civil war already have come to a conclusion in your chronicle and someone other than Faerilyth have arisen to the throne, it's still possible to stage the early events of this scenario. Simply replace peace talks with a similar form of public meeting, and Faerilyth's arguments carry the weight to achieve the desired result. Of course, should Faerilyth have already ascended to the throne in your timeline, the beginning may be somewhat unnecessary. Note, however, that certain events must still take place in order to ensure a climax is reached later on.

The Willow's Tears


Meilge's most overt plans unfold at a peace council ostensibly called for by Faerilyth on behalf of her weary troops. Few arrive expecting anything straightforward from one of the Eiluned, but they walk away from the concord spreading news of an amazing development. Prominent characters may be invited to attend the council, but even those not present soon hear of the remarkable events.

After a customary amount of bickering about various points of order, Faerilyth rises from her place at the table. Tears stream down her beautiful face as she looks on the abruptly hushed and expectant crowd. In a clear, ringing voice marked only by discordant notes of sorrow, she announces:

"My husband's greatest dream was to see his kingdom grow from the land of division and malice he saw as a child into a true home for all Kithain, where they might live happily together and prosper as true children of the Dreaming. He cared not for his crown, but for the Kithain whose strength truly supported it, noble and common. And yet here we are, killing each other over who may lay claim to a soulless piece of metal. I say enough. This bloodshed ends tonight. For one final time, I assert my title as rightful High Queen of Concordia, not that I might further my own glory, but that I might finish building the dream my husband began. So I swear upon the soul of the Dreaming itself."

As Faerilyth's speech concludes, Caliburn appears abruptly from thin air on the table before her. Hands shaking, Faerilyth lifts her husband's sword. To the astonishment of all, it accepts her. Combined with her impassioned rhetoric, the spectacle is enough to sway even the most cynical fae present, and messengers soon ride across Concordia bearing tidings of peace and reports of the high queen's ascension. While doubts remain in the hearts of some, the return of Caliburn and its acceptance of Faerilyth silences the vast majority of opposition. Several weeks later, a clearly moved Queen Mab allows Faerilyth and her entourage to enter the palace at Tara-Nar, and the era of a new, fully recognized monarch begins.

Indeed, all would be well, save for one small detail. Attentive characters present at the council or those with sharp-eyed contacts notice that Meilge, while apparently as compassionate and concerned as ever, radiates an almost imperceptible glow of some strange Glamour at



several points, particularly immediately before the reappearance of Caliburn. It is there and gone in a flash, but for that split second Meilge's façade fails — and a most sinister smile is visible. Combined with rumors that the characters have heard by this point regarding Meilge's questionable honor, this should be enough to send the group in search of the truth.

The reason for Meilge's change in appearance is malignant. After having little luck winning Caliburn by ordering a drugged and beaten David to abdicate his throne, Meilge changed tactics. He allowed the prisoner to come out of his stupor almost entirely, then had the king's brutal handlers confront him with his imminent demise while simultaneously reminding the king of his love for his wife. The result was predictable enough for a Gwydion. Believing death at hand, David willingly passed his claim to the throne on to Faerilyth, this time in his right mind. The handlers then callously dispatched David's chimerical form and returned him to his iron cage. Bound to the high king's word, this time spoken in his right mind, Caliburn transferred possession to Faerilyth. Meilge's pulses of Glamour visible during the council result from the strange treasures he employs to keep track of David and his handlers, timing the operation to achieve the most public and dramatic effects. It is a near-total success, with none save the characters or their contacts the wiser.

And as for the revelation of Meilge's wicked smile, even through the magical mask that supposedly blocks all but the image he intends to project? Perhaps Caliburn isn't quite so fooled as it pretends to be, or perhaps some evils are too great for even such a potent treasure to disguise.

Now for Wrath

After the end of the civil war and Faerilyth's recognition as High Queen of Concordia, life begins to return to an approximation of normal. While minor rebellious outbreaks still occur in some areas, the Kithain generally consider the evidence sufficient to prove Faerilyth's legitimate claim to the throne.

Meanwhile, Meilge moves into the palace as well, continuing his role as "mentor" to his ward, while steadily ensuring that his own agents and sympathizers are on staff. He also takes pains to ensure that the public always sees Faerilyth's actions in a positive light, while occasionally ensuring that his name slips into such stories, always in an equally positive light. Most telling, Meilge quietly convinces Faerilyth to sign an agreement that states, among other things, that Meilge will assume the mantle of high king should death or incapacitation befall her. Shaken by her husband's disappearance and seeking to prevent future suffering, Faerilyth doesn't quite realize to what she agrees. Although ready to launch the most dangerous phase of his plan, Meilge takes his time, carefully solidifying public opinion of Faerilyth as kind and virtuous, while establishing himself as a trustworthy

and doting supporter. Fortunately, such preparation gives investigating characters time to sniff out clues as to what's really going on.

Blood Shed in Anger

When he at last feels the time is right and his reputation is secure, Meilge signals his agents to perform their most heinous duty. Having carefully overseen David's gradual recovery, Meilge's men finally break him to their will and convinced him that his wife betrayed him to steal his throne. Just to be certain of achieving the desired results (they know the price of failing Meilge), the handlers implant several strong Chicanery cantrips in David, ensuring that his emotions and senses follow the plan laid out for him.

So prepared, David is set free not far from Tara-Nar, all memory of his treatment wiped from his mind and replaced with an overriding desire to punish Faerilyth for her "crimes." David's conditioners also take time to cover their tracks both magically and by mundane means. David thus sweeps into the palace, sending servants fleeing before his burning gaze until he reaches the main audience chamber, terrified guards and courtiers who trail impotently behind him. Raw Glamour radiating from his every gesture, David approaches the throne as assembled nobles watch in awe and silence. His loud and nearly unintelligible ranting echoes from the high stone walls. At first joyous, Faerilyth grows afraid, her cries of love drowned out by David's infuriated rambling.

The essence of what David says is clear. He accuses his bride of seducing him, of bewitching him so that he would love her, and of having him kidnapped and tortured when he discovered her ruse. The diatribe continues as a stunned Faerilyth goes silent and unflinching, their combined Sovereign locking all onlookers helplessly in place. For a long moment the two stand opposite each other, unmoving, and then Faerilyth says something so quietly that not even the sluagh can make it out. David's eyes widen, then narrow to slits, and he shakes his head in response.

Faerilyth's last words follow, tears running down her cheeks even as her voice remains firm and regal: "Is there nothing that I can say, husband, to make you believe me?"

"You know our gifts are useless against the Eiluned," David hisses, punctuating those words with a sudden stab to the chest, the blade drawn so quickly it is little more than a blur. Faerilyth slumps to the ground, human seeming mortally wounded, her eyes never leaving her husband even in death. At this point, Meilge steps forward and issues an immediate challenge to mortal death to avenge his fallen kin. David accepts the challenge, hurling invectives at his wife's uncle even as he cleans her blood from his sword.

Though a skilled duelist, Meilge cites their difference in age and appoints a champion to fight in his stead: his captain, the fearsome Lord Bayard Tyrael ap

Eiluned. Despite holding the upper hand for most of the duel, David's guard falters for a critical second, allowing Lord Tyrael to slip a vicious thrust to David's heart. Several onlookers later attribute this blow to a sudden hesitation on David's part, a look of sorrow and confusion as though he had suddenly awakened from a terrible nightmare. Meilge's own rumormongers later try to squash such suggestions.

Holding his ward's body in his arms, Meilge announces that according to Faerilyth's own wishes, it is his sad duty to assume the crown he hoped she would wear for years, and carry on her work. So saying, he lifts the bloodied crown from her head and places it on his own, then raises Caliburn to the heavens in salute... and the approach of Winter quickens its pace.

Now for Ruin

News of the transfer of power sends shockwaves throughout Concordia. If the characters were not present at the palace when the fateful confrontation took place, they quickly hear the details from friends or contacts at court, including the telling slip in David's demeanor right before the fatal blow. By now the characters may have uncovered at least enough circumstantial evidence of Meilge's complicity in David's disappearance, and might conclude that David's sudden reappearance and violent outburst were part of the new king's schemes. Meilge's ascension means the characters need to gather enough damning evidence to accuse no less than the high king himself of murder, kidnapping and torture. That assumes, of course, that they survive long enough to level such charges.

Fortunately, the characters are not alone in their quest to topple the new high king. Some rather unlikely allies emerge. While David's return and act of murder does a great deal to generate sympathy for Meilge — "That cursed Gwydion rage. They're all the same. Hot tempers all of them" — a number of Kithain across Concordia can't help but suspect that something terrible has been pulled off under their noses. While the characters and their allies have to work delicately and carefully to avoid attracting Meilge's ubiquitous spy network (especially as time passes and his control tightens), there may yet be time to depose the usurper and restore Concordia to its rightful state. Perhaps there's even time to turn back the approach of the Winter that Meilge so callously welcomes.

Over the coming months and years (as long as it takes for the characters to build their case), the new high king expertly balances two roles. One, the public face of a grieving monarch trying to hold his kingdom together against the growing threat of Winter. And two, his private identity as a Shadow Court mastermind employing his Thallain allies and foul Prodigal collaborators to ensure that Winter's icy touch spreads slowly but surely across the kingdom. Like all expert tyrants, Meilge amasses control slowly, couching all increasing restrictions or

removal of freedoms in "the demand for increased security measures" or "the need for uniformity of opinion for the kingdom's good." It is a simple enough matter for him to send Shadow Court or Prodigal minions to stir up trouble or leave evidence of another sign of Winter's approach, and then have royal agents "solve" the problem. The result is gratitude from the masses and an ever-tightening iron fist.

While the high king once envisioned a bloodbath for the commoners he despises, the immediacy of Winter combined with his own dark intellect inspires him to formulate an even more terrible plan. Meilge's ultimate goal involves ushering in a kind of "controlled Winter," by which the fae depend on him and his fellow Shadow Courtiers for their very survival in the face of overwhelming fear and Banality. By using the court's connections to bring Thallain and other dark kith into the world, and by hoarding Glamour resources in the name of "Concordian security," Meilge hopes to put the fae at his mercy, utterly dependent on currying his favor lest they face starvation.

It is an ugly cycle. The more Winter manifests, the more frightened and dependent the Kithain become on the king to aid them, giving him more power to summon more of the very beings responsible for the turn of the seasons. Rather than stave off the coming sorrow, Meilge hopes to turn it to his advantage, thus ensuring that none will be strong enough to challenge him, and absolute control of Concordia will be his. As for the rest of the world... well, once Winter is here, perhaps it too shall fall in line.

After all, Meilge is a patient man.

How Did It Come to This?

Since preventing Meilge's schemes is extremely unlikely save for the most capable and fast-moving motley, what can the characters do after the unthinkable occurs and Meilge takes the throne? Once the monarch is firmly in power, deposing him is exceedingly difficult. Leads turn cold, clues vanish and important witnesses fall victim to Banality (or worse).

Yet, failure to dethrone Meilge has a horrible consequence: a nightmarish Winter in which the Shadow Court rules and Glamour is controlled by those in power. By the time the Kithain as a whole recognize the trap into which they've fallen, it's too late to do much about it. With the Shadow Court and its dark allies behind him, Meilge is nigh unstoppable, a tyrant beyond all imagining for the new season at hand. Characters may form an underground movement of sabotage and espionage, but it takes a great deal to turn the world back to the way it was, if it's possible at all.

Killing Meilge outright is insufficient. Aside from the difficulties of touching him, his cronies are insinuated throughout the halls of power. His successor would likely pursue a similar reign of terror. Even if murder achieved some positive result, the characters would be

branded assassins and traitors, and may be without evidence to back up their claims of Meilge's scheming. (And if they have such evidence, they probably try to use it in the first place.)

Assuming Meilge can be removed and a successor appointed with a minimum of bloodshed, the fae face a long and difficult road. Meilge and the Shadow Court have done much to advance Winter. That damage doesn't mend overnight, if at all. You therefore have options for the direction of your chronicle. You can continue the tone of politics and intrigue, dealing with the events surrounding the ascension of the next high king or queen. Or you can shift to present more of a unified front in the face of oncoming Winter, in which the Kithain draw together to try to relieve the world with Spring and a new era of belief.

Portrait Gallery

Although complete descriptions of most of these characters appear elsewhere, most notably in **Nobles: The Shining Host, Noblesse Oblige and Kingdom of Willows**, brief descriptions are included here for ease of reference. The following write-ups also offer story hooks to draw players' characters deeper into the web of intrigue.

King Meilge ap Eiluned — While Meilge's schemes and motives are discussed at length here, it's important to remember three things. First, Meilge's mask is a treasure that allows him to lie with absolute sincerity, even when magically interrogated. It also causes others to view his actions in the best possible light (one reason he so often desires an audience in his schemes). Second, as high king and a high-ranking Shadow Court member, Meilge has legions of followers on whom he can call for all manner of tasks. Indeed, he prefers to use as many intermediaries as possible to make tracing activities back to him difficult. Third, those who confront him directly find him a skilled duelist as well as a masterful magician. While he prefers not to dirty his own hands, he is more than capable of defending himself should the need arise. He is a consummate mastermind and never makes a move without carefully considering what it entails, and how to escape should it go awry.

High King David Ardry ap Gwydion — David's one appearance in this scenario is brief, but exceptionally powerful. Onlookers see him as though he is nearly in his full glory again, his natural *sidhe* majesty and Gwydion fury combining with an instinctual use of Sovereign to make him a veritable thundercloud of fury. Discerning observers may catch glimpses of strange Glamours hanging over him, however, energies that fade just before he receives the fatal sword thrust. While these energies lift with the death of his mortal form, their mere presence may be enough to set characters on the trail of strange enchantments.

High Queen Faerilyth lin Ardry ap Eiluned — As written, Faerilyth's role in this scenario is that of victim to her mentor's dark designs. While she is surrounded by rumors of dark ambitions and manufactured sentiments, those who actually speak to her sense that her love and grief are genuine, as are her hopes for Concordia. Sadly, for all her inner strength and conviction, she is blind to the one true threat to her rule.

Gods and Monsters

For ages, the fae have fallen through the cracks of the World of Darkness. Even since the adoption of the Changeling Way and the mingling of fae souls with mortal flesh, the realm of the Kithain has been a distant dream in human minds, the immortal games of the spirits seldom stirring a slumbering world.

As some hope, there is indeed the possibility of a new Spring on the horizon, but it can be reached only by cutting a bloody swath through the ranks of the Fomorians. To fail is to doom the world to Endless Winter.

Blood on the Wind

More so than perhaps any other scenario presented in this chapter, this is a truly epic finale. This series of events sees the mortal world and the Dreaming inescapably intertwined, with the primordial forces that shaped both waging bloody war before a shocked and disbelieving world. Many fae previously feared that they would ultimately fade away to nothingness, but it seems the Dreaming and its most ancient children have other plans. Players' characters should feel as though they are rapidly drawn into a series of ever-greater events, finally leading up to battles that shake the foundations of the chimerical and mortal realms.

It may sound odd to say that such a powerful and world-spanning scenario requires attention to little details, but it's true nonetheless. Without first establishing a sense of the characters' ordinary lives, and then the early tremors that signal the approach of earthshaking events, players might not appreciate the enormity of changes that occur. Watching elder glomes awaken the Rocky Mountains to rise up and do battle with a nightmarish serpent the size of a hurricane is impressive, sure, but if it's the first thing the characters witness when everything was normal the day before, events lose significance. Learning of the sleeping Inanimae or dragon enemy first, even if only through whispered rumors or ancient tales, makes their appearance all the more impressive.

That said, several of the buildup elements presented previously are useful for this scenario, particularly "The Red Star," "Dreams Deferred," "Cantrips in Flux" and "Shallowings." In addition, "Tithed Ones" adds some particularly fearsome and nasty foes to the ranks of the Fomorians and their dread allies. In fact, a brilliant flare of the Eye of Balor heralds the fall of the Mists and the

beginning of the Transformation. By this time, the fae should have a feeling that something immense and powerful is about to rear its head. The only question is on which side it will be.

An excellent resource for this scenario is **War in Concordia**, which contains a number of rules and ideas about running mass combats suited to any style of storytelling.

The March of Thunder

Although omens, rumors and other prophetic occurrences can certainly alert the fae that something of immense magnitude is about to occur, nothing can really prepare them for the opening act of this scenario. The Mists fall and the Dreaming asserts itself across the Autumn World. This series of changes becomes known as the Transformation. It happens suddenly and nearly without warning, sweeping the banal world and leaving little unchanged.

This beginning is not subtle. Regardless of time of day or night, fae worldwide are drawn to the heavens, watching in horror and fascination as the Eye of Balor grows to triple its previous size, its fearsome red light dominating the sky. All who watch are struck with a growing sense of dread and wonder, as well as a feeling of Glamour stirring within them, almost as if it's brought to a boil. This sensation doesn't abate, but grows stronger with each passing hour until all fae feel as though their nerve endings are on fire with anticipation for... what?

Six hours pass while changelings wait, and then the unbelievable occurs. Without warning, a tremendous wave of Glamour bursts from the depths of the Dreaming and issues across the globe, infusing the chimerical world with tremendous vitality and filling fae with the energy of ancient dreams. Inanimate chimera that have slowly faded or fallen apart appear totally pristine once again. Chimerical creatures appear in the prime of health, reveling in their renewed vitality. Active trods fly open and gape wide without any need to maintain them with Glamour. Even ancient trods swing open, revealing worlds not seen since the time before the Shattering. Balefires flare into barely contained columns of energy, healing all fae around them of even the oldest and most chronic conditions.

The Transformation

As the Kithain stagger from this infusion of energy, the world changes. To changeling eyes, it appears as if both of realities in which they live exist at once, but it quickly becomes evident that much more powerful forces are at work. The chimerical world and the mortal realm do not merely overlap, but merge. Towering castles replace suburban houses. City streets shift into fantastic fairytale avenues. The most legendary features of the

mortal realm mix with the fantastic landscape of the chimerical world until a strangely perfect combination is reached — a world as it might have been had the Sundering never occurred and the fae lived in open harmony with mortals.

Humanity is allowed one small grace period during this change, for good or ill. Although people cannot withstand the sheer assault of Glamour that heralds the approach of the Old Ones and the merging of the worlds, the Mists perform one last act of mercy. When the Transformation begins, every human around the world falls into a deep sleep for one full week. Those in dangerous situations — flying planes, skydiving, driving cars — head to a place of safety as quickly as possible and then fall asleep there (unless it would be more in keeping with the your view of the end for the chips to fall where the may). Nothing short of violence wakes a sleeping mortal, and even then she is “alert” only long enough to defend herself before going senseless again. Roused people react to events as if they're in a particularly vivid dream or nightmare, and absolutely refuse to believe otherwise, regardless of the means used to convince them. No wonder of science or trick of magic prevents this sleep from overtaking a human once the Transformation begins.

While it might seem a curse at the time, mortal slumber is actually a blessing. The Mists function to give humanity time to subconsciously come to terms with what has happened before they awaken to their new reality. Kinain are immune to this slumber. Indeed, thanks to the Augmen they approach the power of full-fledged Kithain in many ways. Prodigals with the Kinain or Faerie Affinity Merit are likewise exempt from the enforced slumber, although they receive no other benefits. Save for those rare exceptions, remaining Prodigals are as helpless as mortals. (At your discretion, the expenditure of a number of Willpower points and some challenging rolls may be required to remain awake, especially if a subject's Banality is high.)

Along with the Transformation and the fall of the Mists comes a potent strengthening of faerie nature,

Possible Twist: What Dreams May Come

Storytellers looking for an interesting variation on this scenario may rule that mortals and affected Prodigals do not awaken until after the coming war is over, possibly after the last traces of the Transformation have faded. While this option significantly alters the course of events in terms of humanity coming to terms with the existence of the fae, it might be just the thing you need to emphasize the fading importance of the Kithain or the forgotten debt that humanity owes them. Even in the hour of the fae's greatest need, the world ignores them.

identical to the first stage of the Augmen. (See **Dreams and Nightmares**. If you don't have that resource, simply assume that any points gained from Birthrights are doubled, that the difficulties of any rolls required by a Birthright are reduced by two, and that all Frailties double or increase in intensity.) Glamour becomes readily available as well, replenishing at a rate of one point per hour, and can be harvested even more quickly at freeholds and in the presence of Dreamers once mortals reawaken. Bunks are no longer strictly required to perform cantrips. As there is essentially no longer any distinction between the chimerical and the wyrd, all cantrips are considered wyrd, but cost no additional Glamour.

Oaths sworn on the Dreaming also carry more weight than ever. Not only are the consequences of violating them more severe, but fae who swear them almost feel compelled to obey. Taking actions that go against the spirit of an oath requires a Willpower point per scene, and actively breaking an oath requires two Willpower points or the subject is unable to muster the resolve to perform such a heinous act.

Lastly, as the sleeping ancients of the chimerical awaken and the Kithain become stronger than they have been in centuries, Banality fades overnight to a nearly impotent force. The Transformation essentially suspends Banality for the time being; the world is simply too fantastic for such utter disbelief to carry any true weight. The one exception to Banality's weakening is cold iron, the fearsome properties of which actually increase. Ordinary fae suffer twice the normal penalties associated with its presence, and may not willingly carry it without the expenditure of a Willpower point per scene. Even iron-resistant fae such as House Balor sidhe and those rare individuals with the Iron Tolerance Merit find it challenging to be around the substance. They suffer no actual penalties to do so, but the experience is distinctly unpleasant and is avoided if at all possible.

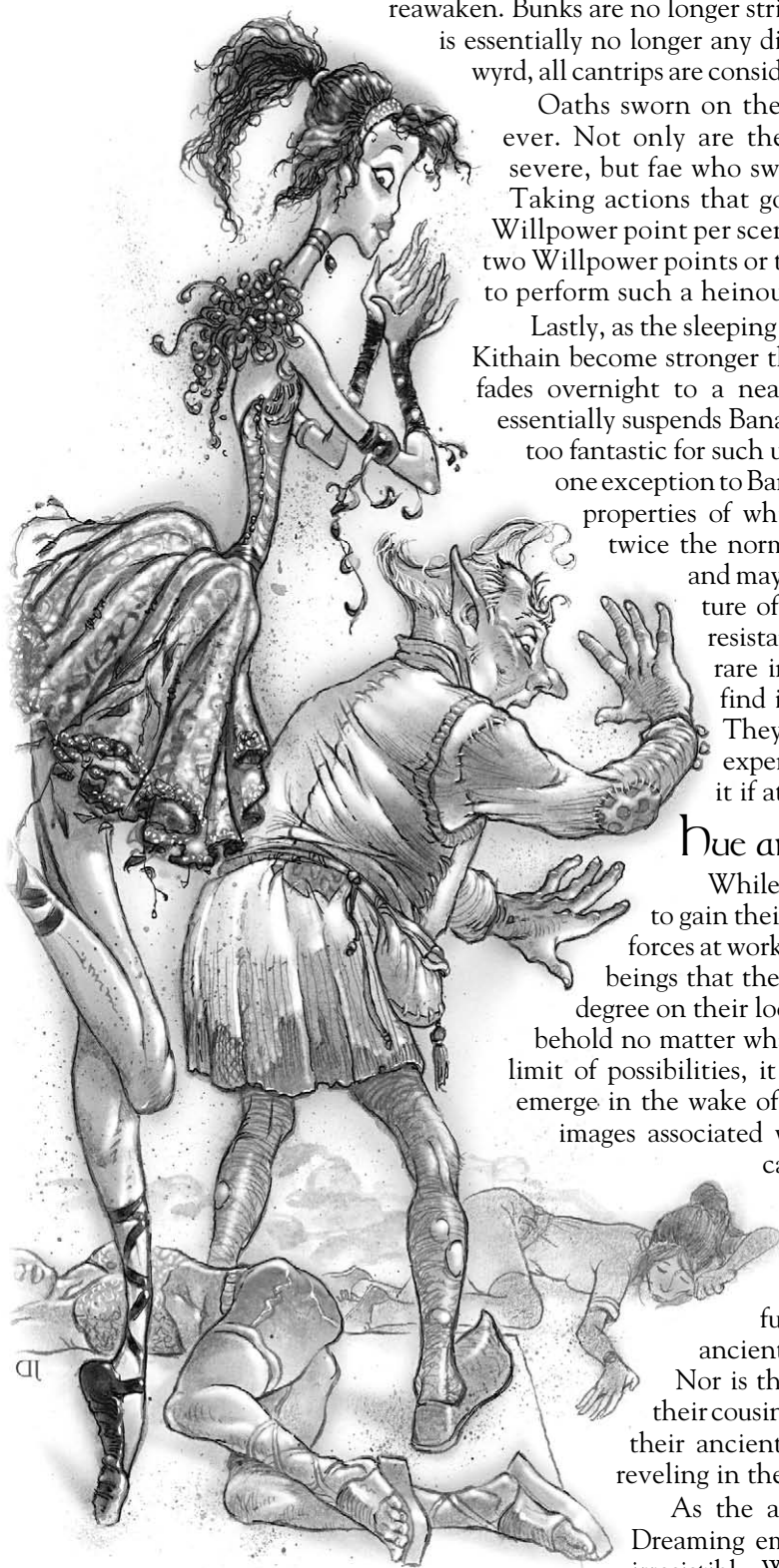
Hue and Cry


While humanity slumbers and the Kithain struggle to gain their footing in this strange new world, the real forces at work make their appearance. While the specific beings that the characters encounter depend to a certain degree on their location, the arrivals should be impressive to behold no matter what. While the following list is *far* from the limit of possibilities, it suggests the scale of the forces that can emerge in the wake of the Transformation (not to mention the images associated with this rising): Ancient Inanimae that

cause entire forests or rivers to rise up and form bizarre armies; the Nunnehi Nations on the march, surrounded by the spirits of fallen braves returned from the Higher Hunting Grounds; and hordes of fuath and fir-bolgs pouring fully armed from ancient trods and assembling into warrior camps.

Nor is this activity limited to just the Kithain and their cousins. Legendary chimerical beasts emerge from their ancient hiding places and patrol old territories, reveling in their newfound freedom.

As the ancient powers and hidden forces of the Dreaming emerge, so too do the Kithain rally almost irresistibly. While previous factional lines are not imme-





diately forgotten, the strange energies of the Transformation combined with the natural need for some feeling of safety and solidarity in the face of sweeping change acts as a powerful inducement to bring Kithain together around the world. Such gatherings are also hotbeds of discussion about exactly what is going on, what it all means and what must be done about it. While different theories are bandied about, most groups quickly come to the conclusion that some massive conflict or other spectacular event cannot be far away, and they prepare accordingly. Even relatively solitary fae or isolated oathcircles hear the call to join such gatherings. Those that still choose not to participate see the threads of Kithain society weaving, for good or ill. In some areas, fae divide along court lines, while in others nightmare beings such as sluagh and redcaps unite under one banner while more “benign” kith gather under another.

Of course, such rallying is far from a coincidental effect of the Transformation, as some learned Kithain suspect. The fae are indeed called together in preparation for an impending conflict, though whether it’s by the wiles of the Fomorians, by the dreamlike urgings of the Tuatha or simply by the Dreaming itself depends on your intentions. Discerning fae note that the forming armies are not necessarily divided by seeming, kith, house or even court. Those who would have met as enemies before now become one without question, and old friends may be bitterly opposed as they join different alliances. Unknown to the Kithain at large, the dividing line lies deep within the hearts of the fae — whether they will stand on the side of the Tuatha and honor their ancient allegiances, or align with the Fomorians and Endless Winter.

This period of division and shifting agreements lasts as long as you desire, although it should remain relatively brief in order to maintain the atmosphere of fear and not just seem like another phase of political power play among the Kithain. Characters should have just long enough to sense what’s going on and perhaps align themselves with a suitable group (if that’s their wish) — to learn how widespread this phenomena is or to engage an opposing group in a skirmish or two — but not have so long that they grow impatient or drift apart. At that point, it’s time for the real war to begin and for the true powers that be to reveal themselves.

Enter the Dragons

Any number of events might herald the arrival of the Fomorians in the world: sudden ice storms, rampant fear and madness throughout the mortal population, unnatural animal activity, hordes of vermin and insects. Regardless of what the characters happen to witness, anyone with even a drop of faerie blood in his veins instinctively knows the truth: The Fomorians have returned and they claim this world for themselves. Almost at once, battle is joined across the globe as the armies of those loyal to these returning evils strike those dedicated to their ancient pacts

with the Tuatha. If they’ve woken yet, humans are caught in between and fight both sides as best they can.

Actual presentation of these primordial beings depends on your plans. You may have the Fomorians felt as little more than a malign *presence* watching over the conflict, occasionally manifesting through omens or flashes of unpredictable magic. Or the beings may wade into battle alongside their troops, dealing devastation to all in their path. For the most part, this scenario assumes that Fomorians — especially those beyond the rank of the White Court — do not actually take the field. Even in such an epic scenario, the higher orders of Fomorians are too powerful to fairly pit against any Kithain forces. There is simply no way for even an augmented changeling to slay the monsters without grossly downplaying their power levels and thus robbing your story of its inherent drama. Truly dedicated and powerful fae could slow such a being down, or maybe even injure it, but short of possessing the Triumph Casque of Sorrows (see below) that is about all they can hope to inflict against these terrible foes.

Regardless of whether or not the Fomorians act directly, the course of this scenario from this point is relatively straightforward, if terribly brutal. It’s all-out war between Kithain and Fomorian armies, with mortals and perhaps some Prodigals trying to survive. How long the war takes and how detailed its planning becomes is left to your tastes and players’ enjoyment. Some troupes prefer to keep combat abstract, focusing on dramatic moments instead of the logistics of marching an army overland in the dead of night. Other groups enjoy depicting large-scale conflicts as accurately as possible, complete with detailed diagrams and miniatures to illustrate the sweep of combat. Given the sheer numbers involved and the scope of the conflict, the latter troupes easily find enough material here to keep themselves entertained for months. There’s nothing wrong with either approach, so long as everyone remembers that this is **Changeling**, not “Faehammer 30K.” Story and character should take precedent over a collection of miniatures and pushpins.

This is *it*, so don’t be afraid to pull out all the stops in describing the fantastic nature of battle. Mighty magic is unleashed and heroic sacrifices are made on both sides. Whether it’s a protracted war or a swift series of brutal and horrifying clashes, the characters should know that the stakes have never been higher — but neither has the chance for true heroes to arise.

Possible Outcomes

Although you’re encouraged to allow your battles to run their course naturally, several likely outcomes to the war deserve special attention. You may also choose to use a combination of these elements or create your own unique ending.

Fomorians Triumphant

Consider this the ultimate worst-case scenario. Should the Fomorians gain control of the Triumph

What About the Tuatha?

Doubtless you've noticed that the Tuatha de Danaan have yet to appear as directly as their Fomorian counterparts. This is no oversight. While you may have these ancient beings appear and do battle alongside everyone else, going that route can overshadow the role of the Kithain. A single Tuatha can easily accomplish what might take an entire army of fae. This is not to say that the powers that be are not watching or perhaps even subtly aiding their descendants, possibly creating zones so infused with magic that the soil burns Fomorian forces, or sending heralds in the form of powerful chimera to act as steeds or messengers. It simply means that bringing them to the forefront virtually ensures that the Kithain and players take a backseat to the unimaginable powers at work. And if there's one thing players should feel, it's that their characters' actions make a real difference, whether it's saving the world or just saving their own hometown.

Now, all that said, there's also the possibility for a "Mutual Annihilation" outcome to this scenario that does beg Tuatha involvement. That story option is detailed elsewhere.

Casque of Sorrows and successfully employ it on the battlefield, there is very little chance of stopping them no matter what forces are marshaled against them. Not even the mighty magic of the Tuatha is a match for the ancient relic, and the Fomorians quickly and brutally destroy all opposition, burning half the world to ash in the process. When it's all finished, they set themselves up as absolute overlords of what little remains, pausing their vicious infighting and backstabbing only so long as to torment those unfortunates left under their rule. The world takes on a completely nightmarish caste, and while some Glamour survives the resulting Endless Winter, it derives only from the agonized delusions of those poor souls forced to live under the reign of such terrible masters.

Tuatha Victorious

Though it's possible that the Tuatha do not actually show their face during the conflict (see the "What About the Tuatha?" sidebar), the Kithain know intuitively for whom they fight. The honor and courage the characters demonstrate in upholding the ancient pacts, even without the Tuatha actually present, proves to the enigmatic beings that their descendants are more than worthy of aid. Should the fae prove themselves through such determination and sacrifice, the Tuatha bestow upon them the gift of the Triumph Casque of Sorrows at their darkest hour, having removed it from its resting place in order to lure the Fomorians out for just this reason. With such mighty aid,

the Kithain quickly turn the tide and slay all but a few Fomorians, and drive these last back into the depths of the Deep Dreaming. (Evil can never be slain completely, after all.) Victory comes, albeit at a high cost.

Mutual Annihilation

With all the heavy hitters out on the battlefield, it's entirely possible that both sides wipe each other out to the last, especially if the war drags on so long that humanity employs weapons of mass destruction. Having the Fomorians and the Tuatha slay each other (presumably setting up others to take their place) is a wonderful way to underscore just how vicious and also ultimately pointless their ancient feud is. In their haste to undo each other, they wind up losing their own existence. Perhaps some Kithain survive to oversee the devastation, even rebuilding from the ashes. Or perhaps the characters are among the last to realize "Well, this is it" as the fae are utterly snuffed out in a final conflagration.

Tackling a War of the Gods

This section covers several important angles to examine when running a scenario of such epic nature. While the outline offered above is certainly sufficient to come up with an engaging end story, you can add layers of depth and complexity. There are also some common problems or concerns that might arise in a scenario of this nature.

Homefront or Front Lines?

Before the Transformation occurs, what kind of scope do you intend to portray in this scenario? Sweeping and epic or local and personal? Obviously, this story lends itself to epic battles and mighty confrontations, but that doesn't mean it's a requirement. Some players enjoy things on a smaller scale. Indeed, you can find a wealth of dramatic material in stories focused on an oathcircle simply trying to defend families or a hometown during this time of crisis, which can make an interesting contrast to world-spanning events beyond the group's corner of the world.

Allies and Enemies

While other scenarios may focus on a select few characters and their actions during the end times, the sweeping nature of this one limits the cast of characters only by the needs of your chronicle. Like it or not, no fae on Earth or in the Dreaming are spared from this final struggle. The only question is whether they choose to charge to the vanguard or stay behind and try to protect what's left of what they cherish.

The inclusive nature of this scenario makes it possible to involve any or all of the prominent canonical characters that you'd like, placing them on either side as suits the person in question. Settling an account with a particularly hated enemy or rushing to side with an old friend are both excellent ways to draw the players' characters into the larger conflict without leading them around by the nose. Likewise, the desire to join forces with particularly authoritative or respected canonical

characters can be a powerful rallying point to help players' characters find a place in growing armies.

Triumph Casque of Sorrows

This legendary artifact is likely to prove the turning point of the war for whichever side finds it first. Should the Fomorians obtain it, the Kithain have little chance to survive. Should the Kithain acquire it, the Fomorians can fall before them. A small group of daring souls (namely, the troupe's characters) might be recruited to search the world or the Dreaming in hopes of finding this fearsome weapon, particularly if the odds turn against the Kithain. Or maybe the characters are tasked with intercepting a similar expeditionary force sent by the enemy before they can return with the casque. Needless to say, should Fomorian forces learn of the plan, they stop at nothing to prevent the group from obtaining the artifact, which in itself presents enough danger to keep the group running scared for quite some time.

Aftermath

Following the last battles of the war, the Transformation begins to reverse, particularly if the scenario involves the destruction of both ancient races. While things do not return completely to the way they were before, the chimerical world and mundane reality separate once again, accompanied by the return of the Mists to separate the two. Faeries slip back into their mortal seeming, once again hidden from the world.

This process is not entirely successful at wiping the minds of humanity, however. Quite simply, too much has happened for humans to slide blindly back into ignorance. And so for the first time in thousands of years, mortals are intimately and undeniably aware of the existence of the fae, although what they do with that knowledge depends on the outcome of the war. Should humanity somehow have been alerted to the threat of the Fomorians and fought alongside the fae, victory might bring a glowing new Spring of cooperation between mortals and Kithain. Alternatively, a devastating loss is likely to incur nothing but mortal bitterness for all creatures of the Dreaming.

Pick Your Poison

Certainly, the Dreaming isn't as strong as it was in the old days, or so the grumps say. As science has risen in prominence among mortals, interest in simple creativity and the power of dreams has waned. Art and music have been replaced by geometry and physics. Some might argue that changelings have allowed this decline to occur. Rather than spending their time cultivating and tending their connections with humans, they've turned their gaze inward over the years, busying themselves with internal political and personal intrigues and all but ignoring the people on whom they rely for Glamour. The result is science superceding imagination for many ordinary people.



This scenario examines what happens when science takes over completely and dreams are left behind. Without dreams, mortals can find neither rest nor release. The Dreaming grows weaker and gradually fades away, and changelings are left with only one option: They must find a way to reconnect with humanity or they will surely perish.

Buildup

To a certain extent, the signs of fae detachment from humanity already exist. Changelings have lost much of their former power over mortals, the Dreaming is not as accessible as it once was, and Glamour has become increasingly difficult to come by. Foreshadowing elements such as “Dreams Deferred,” “Cantrips in Flux” and “Shallowings” help suggest that something wicked this way comes. This scenario examines what happens when the axe finally falls. Although the Dreaming has in fact weakened in recent years, a precarious balance has held. Now, something happens to topple it. The poison is yours to pick.

The first step in developing such a chronicle is to decide on a cause for complete severance between Kithain and humans, and build it into the story. If the rift is the result of humanity’s despair, the chronicle might begin with examples of mortals in the grip of desperation, depression or possibly suicide. As these phenomena become pervasive, the Dreaming reacts. Glamour becomes increasingly scarce as humans stop producing it. Cantrips are difficult to conduct. The Dreaming drifts from the mortal world as people shove it away. It’s soon evident that something must be done, lest the Dreaming be lost forever. Eventually, the Dreaming separates completely and changelings are left with a choice: to make do or find some way to re-establish their connection.

Another possibility is to do away with the buildup and make the break as sudden as possible. All is well until a sudden development causes the Dreaming to rip away from the mortal world. Such an abrupt change is noticeable if not painful to the fae. But what might cause it? Remember that inspirational scientific advancements such as the moon landing serve to increase belief, not decrease it. In this case, a scientific discovery would have to show that something is *impossible* rather than *possible*. Perhaps scientists disprove (to the populace’s satisfaction) the existence of life on other planets, or the possibility life after death.

Storytelling the Rift

Once you’ve established the problem and convinced the characters that something is in fact very wrong with the world (more so than usual), the next step is to inspire them to action. What can they do to turn the tide? After all, this is such a widespread phenomenon that it will be difficult for them to affect it, right? Not necessarily. While it’s impossible for them to individually inspire each and every person in their town or city, it is possible

for them to start a chain reaction that could essentially do the same thing. Remember that it’s the nature of dreams to spread from person to person. Dreams are alive. Simply hearing awe or excitement in someone else’s voice can be enough to share a dream. What the characters need to do is find a way to inspire enough people and re-connect back to the Dreaming. Mortals *want* to dream. It’s the characters’ job to help them do it.


But how do you help the characters understand this calling? At this point in your chronicle, they’re probably either preoccupied with how to get Billy out of the mental asylum, or they’re completely overwhelmed by the order from Duchess Suhanua to inspire the entire city in the next week. While their Kenning may help them understand the nature of the problem, they likely need some assistance to understand how to counteract it. You need to give them this information. Remember that the fate of the Dreaming (and therefore the world) is at stake. Information about how to save the Dreaming shouldn’t just fall easily into characters’ laps. They have to work for it. Finding this information should be a major undertaking; a quest may be in order.

The Dreaming certainly has a sense of self-preservation, so chimerical beings might appear to the characters and bid them to take on the challenge. Local creatures in particular have an interest in seeing the characters succeed. They know that if someone doesn’t inspire regional mortals, the surrounding Dreaming will sicken and die. So, the characters have allies in the creatures of the Dreaming, even those that would surely eat them under different circumstances. The seriousness of the situation might be driven home if the characters run into a helpful Nervosa who offers assistance rather than torment.

Or the nature of the quest could be to save the town, to protect the town’s connection to the Dreaming, or to get Billy out of the asylum, but the first step is still the same. The characters need to find someone who can guide them on how to do it. This search isn’t easy, because most changelings haven’t got a clue how to approach the problem, and the few chimera that are still around aren’t much help. Only the most wise in the ways of mortals can clearly see what is happening and how to prevent it. That could mean characters need to seek out a member of House Liam. Although you’re welcome to develop your own character for this purpose, a sample is provided. Another possibility would be to introduce the High Lord Noman (see **Noblesse Oblige**, p. 129.), a mysterious member of House Liam who always arrives just in time to aid those in need. Yet, he keeps his face and identity secret, always appearing in a different guise.

Catherina MacGregor, Squire of House Liam

Catherina is a troll squire of House Liam who was given the title in recognition of her work with mortals. All in all, she’s a very easy-going sort of person who insists



that visitors call her Rina. She would rather sit down to chat over a cold drink, making merry with the beautiful people rather than spending time in a stuffy fae court. Yet, her temper can be provoked, and it's highly advisable to get out of her way when that happens. Rina runs a halfway house for abuse victims. About 30 women and children stay with her in her remote mountain retreat at any given time.

Rina is no seer, nor does she have any particularly impressive skill with cantrips or Kenning. Yet, plenty of Glamour is to be had at her halfway house in comparison to the nearby town. The house doesn't seem to suffer the ill effects that plague the outside world. In fact, several chimera congregate there where it is relatively safe, and where mortals still produce Glamour to keep them healthy. Why is this place so special above all others? While Rina doesn't have any particular magical capabilities, she does have one special talent that few others do: She has an almost supernatural sense of empathy. She truly identifies with the mortals over whom she watches, and she has made a solemn oath to devote herself to their recovery and protection. So, not only does she possess unusual insight into her mortal charges, she strengthens the Dreaming through her work. Rina is a stellar example of how cooperating with mortals can strengthen the Dreaming to the benefit of all involved. Her skills and instincts could help point the characters in the right direction. The only problem is that Rina cannot leave her halfway house due to her oath. She must stay within the property lines and must protect her charges. So, while she can offer guidance and assistance, it's up to the characters to follow through.

Once the characters understand what they need to do, it's time for them to get to work. They can hunker down and try to wait the Glamour-drought out. Or they need to find a way to inspire a large group of people to jumpstart the Dreaming, and then protect those folks while the Dreaming gains strength. The mortals just learn to believe in dreams again, and a major catastrophe would only undermine the hopes they rediscover. This process takes time since the townspeople are likely frightened and rundown by all of the changes they've experienced. Remember that as the Dreaming has drifted further and further away, mortals have been unable to rest peacefully. They've been without dreams and the REM sleep that comes with them. Most are frustrated or depressed, or have a loved one who feels that way. These sentiments lead to increased violent crime, divorce and general unrest. Experts cannot explain what's happening or why. Inspiring dreams among people is difficult at best, and demands patience and effort.

Unfortunately, the clock is ticking and the Dreaming becomes steadily weaker. You may wish to establish a timeline for the deterioration of the Dreaming. You might decide that the difficulty of all cantrips

increases by one after a week of in-setting time — except at Rina's halfway house, that is. After two weeks, all trods to the Dreaming close or are significantly difficult to access. After three weeks, the Dreaming itself begins to unravel. In areas of particular unrest or disbelief, the Dreaming simply ceases to exist. Nothing remains but empty grayness. A changeling who wanders into one of these vacancies is immediately pushed into her mortal seeming as though she had met chimerical death. These "absent" areas slowly grow over subsequent days until nothing is left of the local Dreaming, and characters are all stuck in their mortal seeming without any way of remembering who or what they really are. In effect, the Dreaming in that town is dead.

Of course, these specific times and effects can be modified to suit your chronicle. A similar timeline might be developed to monitor the eventual healing of the Dreaming, too. Although restoring the otherworld requires work, it also requires magic. It is certainly reasonable to require that players spend permanent Glamour to make the restoration possible.

The Aftermath

Unfortunately, if the characters do not manage to inspire their mortal subjects, the aftermath of this scenario isn't pretty. The characters fail in their duty. After spending an extended period in their mortal seeming, they are eventually Undone. Even if the Dreaming is re-established thereafter, the characters probably can't enjoy it. They're stuck in their mortal seeming forever. Furthermore, local nobles have their own problems with which to deal. If they've managed to save their own communities, their focus is on maintaining their mortals and protecting their borders. They simply might not have the time or strength to offer assistance elsewhere, and they are unable to venture into the characters' town without being Undone themselves. Such a sacrifice would be entirely senseless, even if they had reason to make it.

If the characters do in fact succeed, however, the story has a bright ending. The Dreaming in the immediate area survives and is fairly healthy. It requires constant supervision and cultivation to persist, however, and the mortals who live nearby need constant inspiration and protection to help them continue to produce Glamour.

Not only was the local Dreaming seriously weakened, but it was eroded from the outside. After all, the decay was not simply limited to this town or community. It occurred worldwide. While a few other communities might also have managed to withstand and counteract it, most have fallen into nothingness, and the despair carried by their inhabitants is a constant threat. The characters' only long-term hope is to band together with the fae of other remaining strongholds and to attempt to take

back the grayness, to re-establish the greater Dreaming. Local chimera help as much as they can, but they too are marooned. While they can help inspire local mortals, they cannot get out. But that is the stuff of another chronicle and another time.

The Great Purge

Changelings have long speculated about their origins. The Tuatha de Danaan, said to be the ancient progenitors of the fae, exist only in legend and song, their motives and characteristics lost to time. Truly, the modern-day fae has no idea if she acts as the Tuatha would have wished. If she follows their laws or breaks them entirely. Most changelings dismiss such a question as irrelevant, given that it has been so long since anyone heard even a whisper from their forefathers. But perhaps this question is not so irrelevant, after all. The Tuatha de Danaan exist in the deepest regions of the Dreaming, inaccessible by the Silver Path. Mortal concepts such as time and space have no meaning for them. Tuatha nobles have taken an oath to look over their wayward children on Earth, however, and they take it seriously. Periodically, they send scouts out into the mortal realm to ensure that all is going as they decreed so many years ago.

Unfortunately for changelings, it isn't. Before the Tuatha de Danaan left Earth for their homeland, they made a series of sacred oaths and required their children to swear as well. One of the oaths was simple: never to mingle fae and mortal blood. The resulting creature was said to be an abomination against nature and would prove to be the undoing of the Dreaming. As the centuries passed, all record of the sacred oaths was lost, and changelings never knew that their very existence was outlawed by the decree of the Tuatha. Now that scouts come to Earth once again changelings soon learn the hard way, and the Great Purge begins.

Buildup

In this scenario, the end comes quickly, heralded primarily by the appearance of Tuatha scouts. Foreshadowing elements such as "Errant Trods" and the "Tithed Ones" can add tension and depth to your chronicle. One possible approach is to have the scouts appear and immediately become enraptured or enraged by the mortal world. Although they are quite literally unstoppable in the Dreaming, the scouts have no understanding of mortal doings and could very easily start riots without knowing it. The characters may rush to the scene and calm a situation, only to discover the creatures at the source, the likes of which they've never seen before. The appearance of the scouts may inspire awe and curiosity among characters, but that soon turns to fear.

The scouts seek help. If the characters provide it, they are in a unique position to figure out what is happening in the cosmos and to take steps to prevent it.

The scouts need someone to navigate the mortal world for them, as well as to gain access to fae courts to make a full report to Tuatha nobles. If the characters make themselves useful, the scouts may take pity on them and tell them the truth: that they are servants of the Tuatha de Danaan, and their report will likely result in the extermination of all changelings.

At this point, the characters have three choices. They can attempt to persuade the scouts to make a false report, attempt to recruit the scouts over to their side, or ask them to provide as much information and assistance as possible without endangering themselves. Getting assistance from the scouts is very difficult, since they are both loyal to their superiors and understandably afraid of them. Depending on how persuasive the characters are, the scouts may agree to help outright, but it's more likely that they provide help from behind the scenes, giving characters advance warning of attacks or by providing safe places to hide. After all, the scouts act in accordance with a sacred oath to the Dreaming, and being an oath breaker means facing a dire fate.

The Scouts

The Tuatha de Danaan have capabilities undreamed of by the average changeling. No traits are provided for them as a result. While scouts are the least powerful of all the Tuatha, they have certain advantages that make them terrible opponents for any changeling. They do not suffer from the effects of Banality, because they have no ties to the mortal world. The Mists cloak their magic completely, although they can interact with mortals if they wish. They do not require Bunks to cast cantrips; they do so on the strength of their Glamour alone. Their magical capabilities are limitless, since they draw their Glamour direct from the Dreaming itself. They are essentially immortal, because their bodies are made of Glamour and they have an inexhaustible supply of it. And they can call upon an infusion of power to heal any wound.

Scouts are the youngest and least powerful of all the Tuatha. Their relatively youthful and impetuous nature makes them somewhat sympathetic to the plight of changelings. Furthermore, they have had experience with mortals, whereas few of the Tuatha have had any. One way to allude to such relationships is to give scouts names from mythology. Perhaps they inspired a group of mortals during a previous visit, and an entire religion sprang from the encounter. Certainly, the characters would be greatly impressed to meet Poseidon himself on the shores of Myrtle Beach. That approach would also help the motley understand the power and longevity of Tuatha scouts long before their true identities are learned.

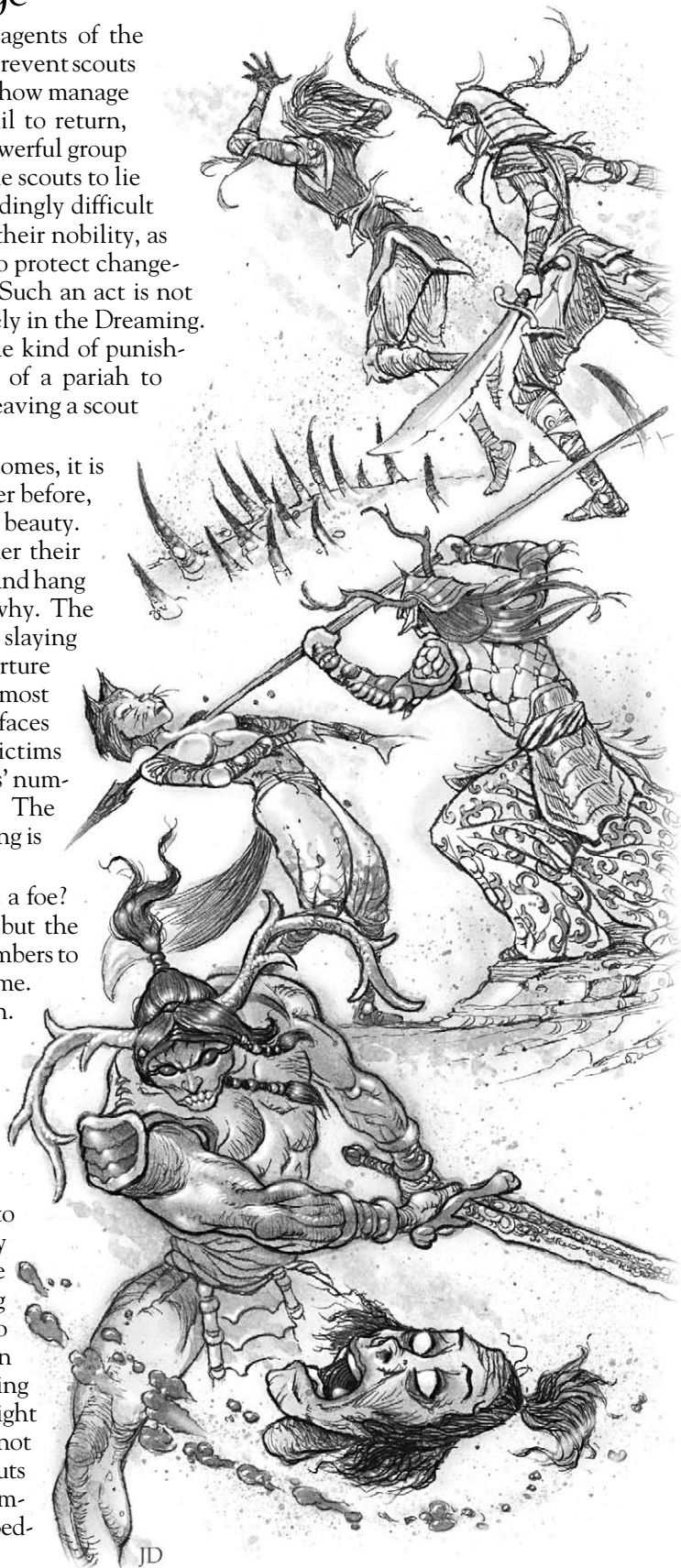
Storytelling the Great Purge

The chances of avoiding battle with the agents of the Tuatha are slim to none. It's very challenging to prevent scouts from making their report. If the characters somehow manage to detain or kill them and the investigators fail to return, Tuatha nobles simply send out a larger, more powerful group to deal with the problem. It's possible to persuade scouts to lie to their superiors, although this course is exceedingly difficult given the respect and fear that agents have for their nobility, as well as for their sacred oaths. By asking scouts to protect changelings, the characters ask them to break a pact. Such an act is not performed lightly by a creature that exists entirely in the Dreaming. (In fact, scouts who break their oaths face some kind of punishment. It could range from a chimerical mark of a pariah to connection with the Dreaming being severed, leaving a scout as an ordinary — but powerful — fae.)

When the battle with otherworldly agents comes, it is swift and terrible. The trods open wider than ever before, and the creatures that emerge are terrible in their beauty. So great is their power that mortals cower under their beds, set out bowls of salt on their front porches, and hang iron over their doorframes without knowing why. The warriors methodically ride through the streets, slaying any and all changelings they find. They do not torture or toy with their victims. In fact, perhaps the most horrible thing of all is the sadness on the killers' faces as they assault desperate changelings, cutting victims off from the Dreaming forever. Yet, the intruders' numbers are many and their loyalty is unflagging. The Great Purge takes only a few days unless something is done to stop it.

But what can be done against so formidable a foe? The Tuatha de Danaan are unstoppable to all but the eldest of changelings, and they have sufficient numbers to overwhelm even these leaders given enough time. Fighting the Tuatha is clearly a losing proposition. The only two options left to the changelings are to run and hide or to attempt to convince the lords that the sacred oath should be lifted.

Running is the easier of the two tacks. The one advantage that changelings have is their understanding of the mortal world. By hiding in a place of mild Banality, characters may be able to suppress their fae seeming sufficiently that they escape notice. Sympathetic scouts might even be persuaded to give characters assistance in healing or obtaining Glamour after exposing themselves to such a high level of Banality. Another option would be to hide in the Dreaming itself. By traveling far enough into the Deep Dreaming, characters might be able to disguise their mortal seeming and thus not seem in violation of any oath. Again, friendly scouts might be persuaded to suggest a haven in the Dreaming. Either way, the characters risk Undoing or Bedlam to avoid the notice of the death squads.



The second option is to convince the Tuatha de Danaan that the sacred oath is misplaced or no longer needed. This is a desperate effort at best, requiring characters to prove that the union between mortal and fae somehow strengthens rather than weakens the Dreaming. How might that be accomplished? The example would need to demonstrate how changelings generate Glamour that would not have existed without their influence. Unfortunately, the most difficult part may be to get the Tuatha nobility to listen at all. Such an effort would definitely require the assistance of sympathetic scouts. But why should the progenitors of the fae listen to the arguments of changelings, who are nothing more than crimes against nature?

Aftermath

Many options exist in the finale of this scenario. The first and least appealing is that the characters do not survive. Perhaps they attempt to fight the Tuatha de Danaan despite the counsel of scouts, and fall to the Great Purge. Perhaps they attempt to hide but are unsuccessful. Or maybe they try to sway Tuatha opinion but cannot persuade the lords to lift the sacred oath. Regardless, this chronicle is over, right? Not necessarily. Remember that while mortal bodies die, some changelings believe their faerie souls return to Arcadia after chimerical death. It would be possible to continue the chronicle with the same souls. They could be reborn in the Dreaming and seek revenge there. Or it might be interesting if they were reborn as changelings in mortal bodies. That would certainly provide evidence that the Dreaming supports the Changeling Way, even if the Tuatha de Danaan do not. The new characters might get glimpses of the Great Purge, and the chronicle could be dedicated to examining how the Tuatha nobility react to changelings' return.

The second option is that the characters go into hiding. They may be one of a few rebellious groups lurking in the shadows, waiting for the Tuatha de Danaan to return to their home in the Dreaming. If the characters manage to remain hidden long enough, the Tuatha do just that. They leave Earth in the care of their scouts. This assumes that any scouts haven't contradicted a direct order or have managed to hide any signs that they have compromised their oath. (Remember that even hiding changelings likely results in a chimerical brand of some sort. Duplicitous scouts need to cover such marks or face the consequences.) This situation is ideal for changeling survivors, relatively speaking. Glamour and trods are ripe for the picking, because the number of changelings is so greatly diminished. Travel though the Dreaming itself would need to be diminished or banned outright, since the Tuatha de Danaan themselves sometimes travel the Silver Path on matters of business or pleasure. A chronicle of this sort could end with the establishment of a new changeling society, or it could continue as the

Lifting the Sacred Oath

What if the impossible comes to pass and the characters convince the nobles that the sacred oath is indeed misguided and should be lifted? What does this mean for changelings, and what are the effects on the Dreaming? The Tuatha patiently explain that the Dreaming needs sacred oaths to maintain its connection with the mortal world. Without oaths, the two worlds would gradually separate. In place of existing oaths, others need to be forged. One possibility is to put mankind in the keeping of changelings. The Kithain would be directly accountable to the Dreaming as a result, and would be charged with insuring that mortals continue to produce Glamour. Provided characters agree to swear to this new oath, the Dreaming remains strong and healthy. Refusing to swear harms the Dreaming, and it is likely that the nobles order the Great Purge to resume then and there.

characters attempt to find a way to justify their ongoing existence to the Tuatha before they are discovered.

Starlight Exodus

What if the end of the Autumn World isn't the end of the Dreaming?

Though few Kithain have contemplated the possibility, the death of Glamour in the mortal world does not necessarily signal the death of the Dreaming. It's possible that the coming Winter may simply be the signal that it's time to return to Arcadia, or to seek a new realm deep in the Dreaming. The question is do changelings have the strength to leave everything they know to seek a new destiny?

On a thematic level, this scenario encompasses some of **Changeling's** core concepts — isolation, alienation and the feeling of being orphaned — and deals with them in an overt fashion. In the face of Endless Winter, the decision to leave may seem like no choice at all, but remember that just as some inmates grow attached to their cells and afraid of the world outside, so too may fae have trouble cutting their ties to this world.

Although this approach to the end offers a certain amount of adventure and the thrill of exploration, understand that this is no more a "happy" finale than any other scenario presented in this chapter. Aside from the many dangers of the Dreaming and the potential of a new homeland, the characters have to leave the people and places they know *forever*.

Buildup

First and foremost, the Autumn World should grow increasingly hostile to the fae as the time of exodus

approaches. In time, Kithain find it difficult to live their daily lives in the face of rampant Banality and seemingly ubiquitous Autumn People. The “Death of the New” foreshadowing tool is an excellent means of introducing the idea that the world is in its last hours.

The enchanted world should also weaken, though not to such an extent that a mass exodus seems impossible. The Red Star could even act as a navigation point, while “Prophecy Fails” might demonstrate the hopelessness of remaining on Earth. Shallowings are a good way to show that *something* is happening in the Dreaming. It is also very helpful if the characters have dealings with or have at least heard of Dice (see **Kithbook: Eshu**) and/or the Seekers of Lyonesse (see **The Fool’s Luck**), though it’s not strictly necessary.

Perhaps the most critical aspect of the buildup of this scenario is a widespread form of the Gloomies, or the yearning that grumps feel for Arcadia. The Longing, the feeling that they belong *somewhere else*, impacts all Kithain regardless of age or Banality. Even fae asleep from excess Banality grow restless or are increasingly consumed by wanderlust, driven to find a place they cannot name but are compelled to seek.

Songs of Leaving

At this point, just about all fae recognize an unmistakable urge to go *somewhere*. Realization of how widespread these compulsions are and discussion of what they might mean closes the buildup period and begins the scenario in earnest. Give the characters just enough time to realize that something big is underway, and then initiate the first stage of the exodus.

The Unknown Road Beckons

Once the characters have had time to discuss what might be happening — but before they get comfortable with the idea — rumors of a strange traveler circulate. A mysterious Kithain visits freeholds large and small and inspires strange behavior in his wake. Fae who have spoken to him have apparently done such things as sell all they own, disavow their mortal lives, turn their backs on other fae and head for parts unknown. Rumors whisper of darker chaos following his visits, as well, from suicides to vicious duels to uprisings against the local nobility. Whether any of this behavior stems directly from his influence is unknown. The characters may even hear of such strange goings-on in a neighboring freehold, giving them just enough time to worry about what this person’s mission is, or what it means to them before he arrives.

In the midst of all this curiosity and speculation, a wanderer approaches the characters’ freehold (or if none is available, the motley directly). If Dice is known to the group, they recognize the Siocháin immediately. If not, a local sage or savvy eshu identifies him. Even those who don’t know the legends of this elusive immortal can see

that he is exhausted. Trail dust is caked on his clothing. His eyes are bleary and his voice is cracked. He doesn’t arrive so much as slump through the doorway and collapse. While his condition isn’t serious, boggans and other sensitive kith may fret over him for a couple of hours before he is ready to tell his tale.

When Dice has had some time to drink and eat, some of the sparkle returns to his eyes, though they’re still tinged by sadness. He quietly but firmly requests that all local Kithain who are available be sent for immediately. He has traveled far to make an announcement and has many more stops to make before he can rest again. Until the assembly is ready, he talks cordially with characters but deflects any questions about his purpose. If anyone brings up the Longing, his eyes grow dark and he simply says that he has had the same feelings, and politely refuses to speculate further. After the local Kithain have gathered, he rises, brushes off some of the dust and bows to the assembled Kithain, his impressive charisma and oratory prowess showing as he relates the following:

“Long have I walked, Children of Arcadia, and long have I watched the world turn. From the War of Trees to the first falling of the Autumn leaves, I have wept and laugh, warred and loved for as many years as there exist stars in the sky. There are few trails I do not know, few places I have not seen, few secrets I have not heard — and yet, by the light of Balor’s Eye, an unknown road is revealed to me. It is no simple trail, but at once a call and a conduit, a path and a purpose for all Kithain. For now the hour of our homecoming approaches. By this road, we shall return to the Dreaming.”

Dice surveys the crowd at this point. If there are any objections or exclamations, he quiets them with a patient hand. Perceptive fae note the shimmer of tears in his eyes, but the sorrow does not quite reach his voice.

“Your questions, your anger, your fears, all these things I share. It has been years since Balor’s Eye first appeared in the sky, and all this time I have sought a different way, searched for another path that might allow us to remain. I even forsook my place as a servant of Dán in my fear of this day’s arrival, convinced that I could prove the omens wrong and set things right. For my pride and what it has cost us all, I can only offer my deepest apologies. For I love this world no less than any of you. There can be no more doubt, though. Glamour withers with Winter’s approach, and so too shall we wither with it, unless we leave this world behind and begin the long walk home. We cannot save it, but we can save ourselves. Perhaps one day we shall return to bring a new Spring to both Kithain and humankind.

“But no longer can we wait here, else we doom ourselves to Endless Winter and lose the Autumn World and the Dreaming alike. The way I ask you to travel may not be certain, may not be safe, but it has hope. In these dark days, that is all I have left to offer. Fortunately, we have this to guide us.”

At that, Dice produces a small, black crystal figurine shaped like the head of a snarling dragon. Currents of

Glamour radiate from the statue. Even those without much grasp of Kenning immediately feel the thrum of power emanating from the object. Exceptionally discerning fae recognize the magic as a mixture of the Wayfare and Dream-Craft Arts, though it's not like any treasure they've seen before. A clap of thunder sounds in the distance, regardless of the time, place or weather.

"After the Eye of Balor opened, I found myself searching for this relic, at first unaware of what I sought, simply knowing I needed to find it. As time passed and the dreams grew clearer, I found it at last, hidden deep in a cave on a Dreaming island off the coast of Albion. Its power is threefold and mighty. It has the power to help us sever our ties to this world, and to renew our spirits for the journey ahead."

Dice explains that by tracing a circle on the ground with this artifact, it establishes a special portal that not only allows fae to cross into the Dreaming, but to summon "guides" to help them on their way. If asked about the nature of these guides, Dice answers honestly that he doesn't know who they might be, only that they are defenders of Arcadia. Whether they are mortals, changelings or even true fae, he cannot say. At this time, Dice also teaches the characters the Oath of the Unknown Road (see sidebar), explaining that only those who swear this most solemn declaration will be able to enter the portals created. In addition to simply speaking the words, the characters must make some kind of sacrifice to symbolize their commitment to leaving this world behind. He cannot say exactly what kind of sacrifice is required, only that it must be important to the individual.

At this point, the fae are likely to be abuzz with questions. Dice indicates that he has to be on his way again soon. He has many more freeholds to visit and precious little time to do so. He cautions the fae on a couple more points.

- It will take one month of mortal time for him to finish his work and for the portals to be ready. That time should be used wisely. (This period can be adjusted if you desire, but not much so. Too little time makes your chronicle's end feel rushed and unfinished, while too much robs the situation of its urgency and causes the story to grow stale.)

- Causing mortal death. While chimerical death may make it difficult to bring an afflicted fae through a portal, fae whose mortal forms are slain beforehand will not have time to reincarnate properly and will be stuck on Earth forever. This is not the time to settle old disputes. There is quite literally nothing another fae can do to warrant a potential eternity of suffering.

So saying, Dice departs, stopping long enough to trace a mystic circle at a site appointed by the local fae for their departure. As soon as he is finished drawing the design, it glows a soft white to Kenning, though it has no other particular effects. Then Dice is off, leaving the characters to sort out a world they must leave.

Oath of the Unknown Road


I pledge this day to prepare myself for the long journey home, and swear on my honor and my faerie soul that once I take my first steps, I shall not turn back, nor shall I long for what is lost. I turn my face from the winds of Winter and set my eyes upon Arcadia, and pledge my life and my effort to reach her silver gates for the final time. I go forward with my heart confident, my mind clear and my spirit rejoicing, for I go home at last. So swearing, with these words I leave this world behind.

In addition to giving those about to undertake the journey a sense of purpose and direction, this oath provides certain benefits when traveling through the Dreaming. The promise prevents characters from being reincarnated back on Earth, albeit at the risk of possibly having their essence lost in the Dreaming. It does this by infusing a small talisman or other personal item of the character's with a unique purpose. Should the owner die, his fae spirit does not enter the normal process of reincarnation, but retreats into the item, remaining there until the object is utterly destroyed or until the oath's destination is reached. Objects infused in this fashion cannot be stolen. Nor can they be damaged short of powerful magic or the use of cold iron. Only small objects such as rings or necklaces are infused in this fashion. Weapons and armor never become foci.

Should a motley swear this oath together, these trinkets immediately transfer to other members upon the death of an owner, making it possible for the entire group to reach the final destination, even if only one member actually survives the journey. (All members must wait to be reincarnated then, but that is a small price to pay compared to being reborn on Earth during Endless Winter.) Of course, should a changeling die after swearing this oath alone, or an entire motley falls along the way, their essences is lost somewhere in the Dreaming. While Dice does his best to search out such lost relics, there is always the chance that they might be destroyed by some quirk of fate... or that sinister forces may find them first.

All That You Leave Behind

After Dice leaves, the characters' community is likely to be thrown into an uproar. While the sworn oath of such a powerful and ancient fae puts the truth of the matter largely beyond question, that doesn't mean things will be decided very quickly! Many fae are stunned by the implications of what must come next. While they were aware that things were growing steadily worse in the world, the abrupt knowledge that they need to evacuate in order to survive is not something for which even the most paranoid or superstitious are



prepared. For some, the idea of leaving is liberating (though that's not necessarily a good thing). For others, it's a time of fear or anger at the mystery to come and for the attachments they must sever.

Aside from any unique local or oathcircle-specific concerns that come up, there are several critical factors to consider when running this part of the scenario. Without at least touching on these bases, the eventual exodus will seem abrupt and one-dimensional. It is only by giving the characters a strong sense of what they give up and how it makes them feel that the players can portray them honestly. Even if some aspects of the characters' lives are glossed over, considering them completes the scenario in players' minds. Characters face a genuine goodbye rather than just heading off on another quest.

This stage is the heart of the story. Once the fae step onto the trod and begin the long journey home, it's really more of a new beginning than an end. Part of the trick of this scenario is that while Winter would eventually settle all accounts (if only by annihilation), it is truly the characters who decide what the end times are like. No terrible disaster or contagion lays any realm to waste. Nor does any great war or sudden mystic impulse force the fae to react a particular way. Whether the final days are spent in quiet merriment and bittersweet goodbyes, or drenched in bloody feuds and mindless vandalism depends entirely on the characters and players. In short, they get precisely what their actions demand, which is at least as fitting and often far more terrible than any sort of judgment from on high.

While the players shouldn't be bogged down with accounting for every last parting detail, don't underestimate the value of characters making amends, resolving issues and parting ways. It's in saying goodbye that characters sum up your chronicle and decide their own future.

Kithain Society

For the most part, Kithain react to Dice's announcement in one of three ways: revelry, violence or sorrow. For some fae, knowledge that the return to the Dreaming is at hand is cause for celebration. While they do not deny that departing the world brings a certain amount of sadness, as a whole it is a time of rejoicing. They are going home at last! These fae spend a great deal of their remaining time going out partying, holding "wakes" for the Autumn World and otherwise indulging every earthly desire before the journey begins. Once-forbidden trysts become acceptable, parties take on a frenzied air of joy and desperation, and the most polite and tactful fae at last speak their minds, for better or worse. After all, what's the harm in a stoic troll bodyguard confessing his love for his beautiful sidhe lady when great danger and uncertainty loom?

Of course, this air of reckless abandon has its own consequences. Despite Dice's warning, many fae see it as a time to settle long-standing grudges. Duels become common.

Skirmishes erupt in volatile locales as factions take parting shots. Even those who don't partake in such violence may be caught in the crossfire. Stopping the violence before anyone is trapped on Earth may be an important goal for the motley, especially if members hold positions of authority or feel any responsibility to their fellow fae.

Even if the Kithain don't attack each other, they must still be cautious of worldly threats. The antics of celebratory or nihilistic fae have the potential to draw the wrath of the law, Prodigals or even the dreaded Dauntain. Being arrested by mortals or killed by supernatural powers denies Kithain the chance to set foot on the new road.

Last but certainly not least, there is bound to be a great deal of sorrow surrounding this end, whether the fae choose to admit it openly or not. Despite the certainty of Winter and the terrible fate that it entails, some fae may still choose to remain behind, whether out of love for mortal friends and family, a sense of obligation to an important cause, or simply because they cannot bring themselves to let go. Still others may be afraid of the journey, or object to it based on deep-seated personal beliefs, sometimes even surprising their closest friends and longtime oathmates. For all the hope a character may have of possibly returning to Earth to be reunited with friends one day, most recognize that such a day may be hundreds if not thousands of years off, and they treat it with accordant gravity. Trying to talk one of these reluctant fae into coming can be the focus of intense personal game sessions.

Rescuing Sleepers

There is also the question of what to do about those Kithain whose fae spirits still cling to their mortal forms, but are not hopelessly squashed by Banality? It's possible to bring these poor souls along, though the Banality they carry with them will make the going slow and the way treacherous. (Not to mention that convincing them to freely swear the Oath of the Unknown Road in their slumbering state will be difficult, to say the least.) This concern is particularly important if characters know any mentors, patrons or even former motley members who have fallen. If characters don't think about it, you can present a quest or two to rescue such sleeping changelings before it's too late. A local noble might charge the characters with completing the task as their final service, or a childling might approach them and ask them to save a Kithain grandparent.

Of course, there is also the matter of rescuing fae trapped in mortal prisons or institutions. Aside from the difficulties and complications inherent to any kind of breakout, other questions arise. The Banality that surrounds prisons and hospitals and that infects their inhabitants has to be overcome, but the characters also have to wrestle with the implications of releasing potentially dangerous or unbalanced fae.

While many Kithain are wrongly imprisoned by mortals or even other fae, not *all* of them are. Can the characters really release a hardened murderer or a fae in the deepest throes of Bedlam, even for such an important cause as this? What happens if a freed prisoner commits heinous acts before the exodus? Can the characters take that risk?

And what of the Dauntain? They are hopelessly lost to the service of Banality in this lifetime, but is that reason to condemn any future incarnations to Winter? Can they be brought back to the way of Glamour at this final hour, or are their spirits lost for the sins of this life? While such questions of redemption may not be for every chronicle, especially if the Dauntain have not had much of a presence in your game, you can still confront the players with the question of what to do with the Dauntain as a larger issue.

Humanity's Last Look

All but the most reclusive and Bedlam-afflicted fae have mortal contacts and connections that they desire to put in order before they leave. In contrast to more openly dramatic or violent conflicts of Kithain society, this is an excellent opportunity to showcase deeply personal roleplaying. Fighting off a gang of destructive redcaps is dangerous, but kissing a spouse and children goodbye is gut wrenching. Allow each character a chance to settle affairs and reconcile with mortal life, if only to give it all a final defiant gesture. Even the most standoffish wilder

or bitter grump defines herself by her human nature as much as by her faerie one. Your game would be remiss to not allow characters a chance validate their identities one last time.

Fires at Midnight

No matter how busy the fae are in the aftermath of the announcement, or how wisely they spend their remaining hours, time eventually runs. The deadline of the exodus arrives. In the days prior to the departure, disturbances in the Dreaming grow stronger and more frequent, as do violence and disorder in the Autumn World. If any fae still harbor any doubts that the end is at hand, some of the phenomena of these last hours should lay such concerns to rest. If nothing else, on the penultimate night the Eye of Balor grows to the size of a small moon, bathing the chimerical world in its eerie reddish glow. Roars and calls from great beasts of legend can be heard faintly on the wind, as can the thudding footsteps of giants.

Fae gathered at the appointed sites witness a strange glow as the sun's light fades on the horizon. Portals look like softly pulsing circles of light, and the emanation intensifies until it is nearly as bright as a new sun risen. Items infused by the Oath of the Unknown Road glow faintly in response, especially as a bearer draws near a circle. No one can enter yet, though. Those who attempt to are repulsed gently but firmly, regardless of skill or



strength. Repeated attempts only trigger more forceful (but never lethal) reactions. With the fleeing of the last rays of natural sunlight, silhouettes appear in the center of a portal's glare. They're barely discernible at first, becoming clearer until fellow fae clearly step from circles and greet would-be travelers.

A surprise awaits with the arrival of these mysterious beings. They are one-time members of the local freehold or motley, once lost but now returned. They may be fallen friends, mentors long since passed or people the characters knew and respected. They are dressed in resplendent armor and fine clothes, but otherwise appear exactly as they did in the prime of their lives, and these arrivals favor the characters with welcoming looks and warm expressions. All can spend a few minutes overcoming their astonishment and catching up. While these returned sons and daughters are cagey about Arcadia and what awaits beyond ("You have to see it for yourself"), they say they have been sent to help the rest on their way. They explain that passage to Arcadia is not safe or guaranteed. But knowing that risk, these guides have come back for their friends and family, determined to bring them home.

If Dice is particularly close to the characters, he may appear to join the motley. He does not journey far with them on the other side, though. He wishes to keep track of many different groups along the way in case they need assistance.

Parting Words

After everyone has said goodbye to those remaining behind or have otherwise resolved their lives, the Arcadians indicate that it's time to go and lead the fae into the circle of light. Entering the circle fills characters with a sense of wonder and resolve. All lost Willpower or Glamour points are refreshed immediately. Characters have one last moment to speak or to admire the world they leave, and then the light grows so bright that even those with their eyes shut see nothing but white radiance. The sounds of the mortal world fade away to nothing, replaced by the softly alien sounds of the Dreaming. There is a slight pain, as though some last tie is severed, then nothing but a sense of belonging remains. Characters open their eyes to discover that they are in the Near Dreaming, but with no sign of the mortal world. There is undoubtedly a moment of realization as knowledge that the Autumn World is gone sinks in, and then the characters may take stock of their surroundings.

The Silver Path stretches out before them.

The stars shine down.

The Longing calls to them.

The journey begins.

Don't Look Back

The choices confronting characters from that moment offer an endless array of possibilities. You may choose to end the chronicle at that moment, allowing

the players to envision the hardships and adventures their characters have on their journey. While certainly not an ending for every group, it can prove a surprisingly satisfactory one as it grants players the freedom to imagine their own aftermath.

Most likely, players clamor to continue adventures in the realm stretched out before characters. Given the vastness of the Dreaming and the difficulty of even a relatively guided return to Arcadia, this journey can be the subject of months or even years of play. Generally speaking, your chronicle can take one of two approaches at this point.

Arcadia, Ho!

Given the themes of isolation and alienation that run throughout **Changeling**, the prospect of returning to an ancient homeland has a uniquely powerful appeal. Getting to Arcadia might seem an incredibly distant goal at times, even with the help of Dice and the Arcadians. But thanks to the sacrifices they've made and the oaths they've sworn, the fae hope that it's *possible*. It might mean months or years of journeying through wondrous and bizarre realms, but it *can* be done. Arriving at the gates of Arcadia after a suitably amazing and harrowing trek can be a wonderful epilogue to a chronicle. It's still advised, however, that aside from some powerful and poignant description you do not try to continue the action once the fae have actually entered Arcadia. Even in **Changeling**, there are some things best left to the imagination.

Our Own Place and Time

Alternatively, you may wish to avoid characters returning to Arcadia in favor of having the fae establish a new home somewhere in the Dreaming. Perhaps Arcadia is poised to fall in a bitter war and survivors have been sent out to gather the fae to find a new home. Or maybe the Dreaming simply requires that the fae seek out a new realm where they can establish the same ties they once had with Earth. Perhaps like the Seekers, the fae pursue the mythic realm of Lyonesse, or maybe they feel that the Red Cities of Mars are the ideal site for a new fae society. Different groups may even split up in pursuit of separate destinations, leading to competing factions or other unusual twists.

Dreams and Nightmares offers a great number of possible destinations for characters (not to mention places to see along the way). Don't feel limited to what's contained in that book, though. While creating an entire new world for the fae to inhabit requires a great deal of time and effort, the reward can be well worth it.

Earthbound

Fatefully, it's also possible that the characters aren't the ones who cross through the portal. The future of characters who remain behind is bleak, but you can tell grave, pathos-filled stories. Even if it simply means quietly fading away into Banality in the presence of loved ones, handling a group of Kithain at the end can be a

rewarding roleplaying experience. Just make it clear that there will be no 11th-hour rescue. Under those terms, portraying the world at last succumbing to the smothering chill of Winter can be as compelling as any journey through the Dreaming.

Storytelling the End

Directing the end of the world is no easy task. Not only is your story one of literally epic proportions, but your players must be both concerned and involved to make this an enjoyable chronicle. As a Storyteller, the fate of the world is in your hands. The desired result is simple: a game exciting enough that the players talk about it for years to come. Or perhaps this is a long-awaited end to a group of well-loved and long-played characters. Regardless of the background of players and characters, a chronicle of this magnitude requires special consideration. Stories about the end of the world can quickly become frustrating if characters are swept off their feet by circumstances over which they have no control. A carefully laid plot could be undermined by frustrated players who refuse to cooperate. This chapter provides suggestions on how an end-of-the-world **Changeling** chronicle might unfold, as well as some issues to consider when planning your own personal Armageddon.

An Epic Tale

The first thing to remember about the end of the world is fairly obvious. This is big. Epic. Earth-shattering. Now, while this is clear to you, the Storyteller, it isn't going to be obvious to the players and their characters unless you call your chronicle "The End of the World." The fun part about planning a game of this magnitude is that your players don't have the slightest idea of what's going to happen, and their excitement (and their characters' worry) grows as they unravel the puzzle you set out for them. Of course, for all this to work you have to clue them in that something awe-inspiring is underway. While you could have a Storyteller character run pell-mell through the streets screaming, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" that is can be an anticlimactic approach. The players are invested in the story if they put the pieces together, and their character get involved in goings-on of their own volition.

The question is how to make all that happen. For an end-of-the-world plot to work, you need to provide two things: a sense of scale and a call to action. Sense of scale simply means the players and characters are convinced that this isn't your average find-the-enemy-and-smite-it type of story. Experienced players are used to dramatic confrontations and threatening creatures that lurk in the shadows. They need to be convinced that this threat is somehow different, more encompassing and more *dangerous* than all others combined. There is so much more at stake here than in the average chronicle. Once players

are convinced that they'd better sit up and pay attention, they need somewhere to start. The concept of Endless Winter is difficult to get one's mind around, and it's very easy for characters to look at the odds they're up against and decide chuck it all. The whole situation is entirely out of their control. If, however, you give them enough information to get started on their quest, whatever it may be, the task looks a little less daunting. Not a lot less, but at least a little.

All of this is well and good, but how do you make it happen in your chronicle? In the preceding scenarios, we discuss some specific signs that might be introduced. These portents are designed to increase tension and to show that this is more than just a run-of-the-mill problem. The goal is to convey an epic feel by which the players eventually realize the fate of the world is at stake. If signs provide a little information about the problem, that helps you point the characters in the right direction. For example, if you decide to run a chronicle in which the Dreaming fades away, having hordes of powerful chimera wandering the streets might not be an appropriate indicator of your end. Now, the streets could be eerily devoid of any chimera, or the local Dreaming could take on a grayish cast as Glamour leaks away. This sign not only establishes the appropriate mood but gives characters some hint as to what's going on, and that may be enough to inspire them to act.

The following signs may be incorporated into your chronicle. These could be used with the sample scenarios provided or with stories of your own devising. Once again, select omens that complement your impending end and each other, both logically and thematically. The last thing you want to do is throw your players off track with a poorly chosen sign.

- **The Dreaming becomes stronger or weaker.** Evidence of the Dreaming's change could manifest in a number of ways. The number of chimera in the area increases or decreases. Fae seeming could become so strong that open-minded mortals can see it, or could gradually fade to nothing. Trods could suddenly pop up in the strangest of places or vanish without warning, leaving travelers stranded on the Silver Path. Cantrips might become 10 times more or less powerful, to the danger of changelings everywhere. Imagine what might happen if a Hopscotch unexpectedly took a poor childling a half-mile into the air when all she expected was a little bounce.

- **The Dreaming becomes erratic or unbalanced.** Perhaps the balance between Seelie and Unseelie or Glamour and Banality is disrupted. The trick to planning these signs is to make their manifestation unpredictable, but to give them an underlying theme. If the balance between Seelie and Unseelie is disrupted, indicators could involve light or shadow. A random group of changelings could suddenly be struck blind by a bright flash of light, or Will-o'-the-Wisps could multiply like bunnies in the local freehold. For something more serious, per-

haps the sun simply fails to rise. These could be chimerical occurrences, or all too real.

- **Changeling/mortal relations suddenly change.**

The fae depend on mortals for their very existence. The Kithain live as a result of the dreams of unsuspecting humans. But characters might suspect that something is awry when humans can suddenly see flashes of their fae seeming, produce more or less Glamour than ever before, or give birth to new and interesting types of chimera.

- **Prophecies come true.** This is perhaps a no-brainer, but witnessing an ominous prophecy come true can be enough to convince the greatest of skeptics. The characters themselves could have prophetic dreams. They get the uncomfortable feeling that someone somewhere is pulling strings and making things happen, and they'd best be alert.

The Theme Is the Thing

What kind of story do you want to tell? The overall theme and tone of your game greatly influences how you handle plot, pacing and character interaction at the end. You could run a subtle game in which the little people fight the most important battles, although their efforts may be overlooked in the grand scheme of things. Or you could run an epic game in which explosions rock the streets and people pray to the gods for salvation while battles rage around them. One important thing to consider is how mortals fit into your plot. What does it mean for your chronicle if characters have to hide their doings from mortals, as usual? What if humans are closely involved in the fight? How does either approach affect changelings' capacity to function without gaining too much Banality?

In the first option, most of the "old rules" still apply. The fae operate outside the supervision of mortals and do what they like. Banality and the Mists are still major considerations when they make plans and take actions. The second option examines what happens when those rules change. If the Mists fall and mortals are dragged into the fight to save the world, changelings are no longer anonymous. They are no longer able to hide in plain sight. Depending on the changelings (and humans) involved, mortal awareness could be a positive or a negative development. Perhaps the groups can reach an understanding that allows them to coexist peacefully. Or perhaps an all-out war with humanity is inevitable. Maybe it's the final straw that ends the world in a flash of Glamour or Banality.

Personally Speaking

On a character-specific level, the theme of your end — personal or epic — helps clarify what players want to accomplish. Certainly, characters have an opportunity to save the world, but they can also learn lessons along the way. Remember that your story is ultimately not about catastrophe but about the reactions of a small

group of people. Even if the characters aren't successful in retrieving Caliburn or capturing Duke Dray, they might still take heart in the fact that, through sacrifice, they may have atoned for wrongs committed in the past.

Setting achievable, personal goals for characters adds an intimate dimension to your chronicle, and inspires some interesting roleplay. How do the characters react when forced to choose between helping a close friend in need or going on an important quest to save the world? Do they attend to selfish business or attempt to stave off catastrophe to buy time for everyone else? By giving the

In-Character Moments

It's easy for characters to be overshadowed by events in a chronicle of this magnitude. So much happens and on such a grand scale that the focus can fall on what happens next. Roleplaying is a group effort, though. The real issue isn't the atrocity at hand, but the characters' experience of it. If you've taken steps to ensure that the characters are involved in the action, you're on your way to telling a rewarding story. But you may still be able to do a few more things to make players an essential part of the story.

With an epic tale comes dramatic moments. Each character should have a chance to shine. Perhaps one has an unusual capability that is essential to the success of the mission. Maybe he has the opportunity to finally reconcile with a long-lost love after years spent apart. Or the characters sacrifice themselves for the greater good. Think of your chronicle like an action movie. The movie doesn't end until the hero has had his moment to save the girl/defuse the bomb/go out in a blaze of glory with a well-timed witty remark. Your players' characters are the heroes (or anti-heroes) of the story, and they deserve similar opportunities.

In terms of in-character moments, you have a few options. Some Storytellers choose to throw the rules out the window for spectacular moments. Given that this is an extraordinary situation, you may choose to forego a die roll or two to give players the satisfaction of a spectacular accomplishment or death scene. Other Storytellers simply let characters take center stage and allow players do much of the narration.

The only ironclad rule is: Never ruin a player's moment. Although you understandably anticipate the players' actions by establishing the framework of the story, that's no excuse to rush or dismiss events. Give each player his moment. If someone asks you about a rule just as the motley's eshu has fallen to his knees to beg forgiveness from his long-lost love, quietly inform the intruder that this isn't the right time. It's your job to protect all players' moments, because those are the ones they'll remember for years.

characters a choice, you let players examine what makes their characters tick and what is truly important to them.

The basic themes that create this dichotomy of personal versus global are peace, atonement and closure. Characters who search for peace might seek out loved ones, try to come to terms with humanity in general or give in wholeheartedly to the Dreaming. Those who look for atonement could ask for forgiveness for past sins. (But how might they react if that forgiveness is denied?) Those who want closure may try to complete unfinished business or fulfill remaining goals. All of these themes might apply to the same group of characters or even to one character, and are dictated by players exploring who their characters are and where their priorities lie. Your job is to give them the opportunity to explore these principles and to present choices.

The Big Picture

Another important point to decide about your chronicle is what ultimately happens. Generally speaking, your finale is a matter of personal taste. It could be tragic, but the characters make their peace. They fulfill personal goals or accomplish incredible feats, even though they aren't successful in saving the high king, averting Winter or hunting down Duke Dray. Or the opposite could be true. The characters don't reach their personal goals, but manage to save the world anyway. Although they're world-renowned heroes, are they content without personal fulfillment? Any combination of personal ends and story finales is possible. Just be warned that players faced with failure on both counts might be discouraged. Setting up a variety of different objectives gives characters an opportunity to succeed at *something*, rather than leaving them feeling impotent.

Happy endings are straightforward. The players avert the end of the world. They succeed at all tasks, solve all problems and stave off Winter. But what if the characters fail or only do part of what's necessary to halt the end? Is a happy ending still possible? Of course. You can't have Spring without Winter. The coming of Winter could somehow result in a better world in your game. The passing of the seasons cleanses or alters reality in a way that's positive, and those fae who manage to weather the cold understand that they're part of a natural cycle. Although Winter is painful and unpleasant, it's necessary to invite rebirth.

Potential Ends

What does the end mean for changelings? Is it utter and absolute, or is a new beginning possible? What's in store for the changeling race? Can the fae survive, and if so how? Can your chronicle continue even though Winter has arrived, and what would characters do in such an age?

If Winter is avoided, it's easy to assume that the fae have it easy. But consider the repercussions of what was

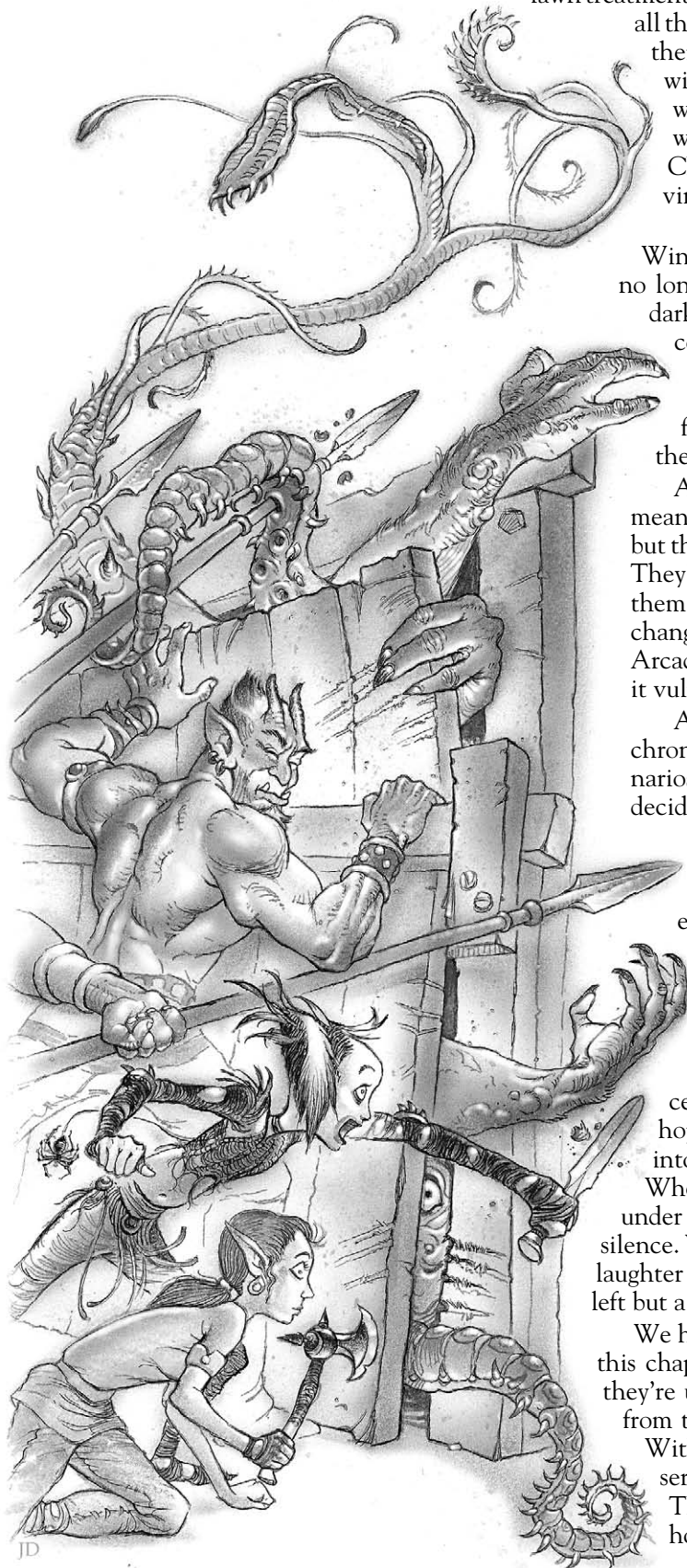
done to avert doom. Did the Unseelie seize control of fae courts in an effort to restore the balance? If so, do the Unseelie relinquish control at Beltane as they should, or do they take this opportunity to repay the Seelie for years of oppression? (It should be noted that, if they attempt the latter, it's only a matter of time before this whole process repeats itself.) Were changelings forced to seek shelter in the Dreaming or did they have to re-establish ties with mortals to bolster Glamour? Did High King David return? Is he in any condition to rule? If Winter does not come, your world continues and the results of characters' efforts may come back to help or haunt them. Perhaps the characters implement reforms in freeholds throughout the realm, or work more closely with mortals in an effort to maintain relations.

A chronicle might continue during the long Winter, too, but it's advised that Spring should follow. Your players want something to work toward, after all. It's discouraging to struggle through the Winter only to watch characters die of old age. The first question to ask is whether changelings are aware of what's happening to them. Perhaps they're forced to retreat into their mortal seeming to survive, and their fae seeming wakes at the coming of Spring as if from a long hibernation. Or perhaps they're aware of what happens around them and have to seek shelter in freeholds, the only places where a little Glamour is still available. These chronicles could involve long, drawn-out sieges in which the fae attempt to hold on for years against an onslaught of monsters. Icewyrms roam the skies and Autumn People attempt to batter down the walls, but the fae hold firm, waiting (praying) for the coming of Spring.

Why Is This Happening?

Is Winter a natural result when the Dreaming is endangered? It could be that Winter is a defense mechanism of dreams. The Dreaming goes into a self-imposed hibernation, and uses this dormant season to heal its wounds. Then all it takes is one amazing achievement to bring the power of dreams back into the world. Or is Winter a final fate brought upon the world by heinous acts or bad decisions?

Certainly, dreams have less power over the actions of mankind than they once did. That might be a natural phenomenon and a resurgence could be within sight, unknown to the fae. The Dreaming's decline could also be attributed to mortals' increasing reliance on science and technology to solve problems. People are less afraid of the dark than they once were, because they're protected by house alarms, motion-sensing lights and scientific explanations of the unknown. Perhaps science is to blame. If that's true, what can changelings do to counteract the trend? How can they impress upon people that dreams are even more important than figuring out π to the 500th decimal point or developing a new chemical



lawn treatment? Another potential explanation is that the fae let all this happen. While they were busy arguing amongst themselves, mortals continued to exist and grow without them. Now people have learned to live without the direct intervention of the fae. In other words, they've learned that dreams are expendable. Changelings have little other choice but to convince humanity otherwise.

Another potential reason for the coming of Winter is imbalance. Winter looms because the Seelie no longer honor the natural order between light and dark. They no longer give up dominance over the fae courts at Samhain, creating an imbalance in the Dreaming where the light holds the majority of the power. Eventually, the disorder is too much for the Dreaming to endure and it resets to remedy the situation.

A final explanation is that changelings are not meant to be on Earth any longer. Arcadia is their home, but they have insisted on inhabiting the human world. They're invaders, and the Dreaming did not intend for them to exist so long outside of its borders. Perhaps changelings themselves caused the problem by leaving Arcadia, thereby fracturing the Dreaming and making it vulnerable.

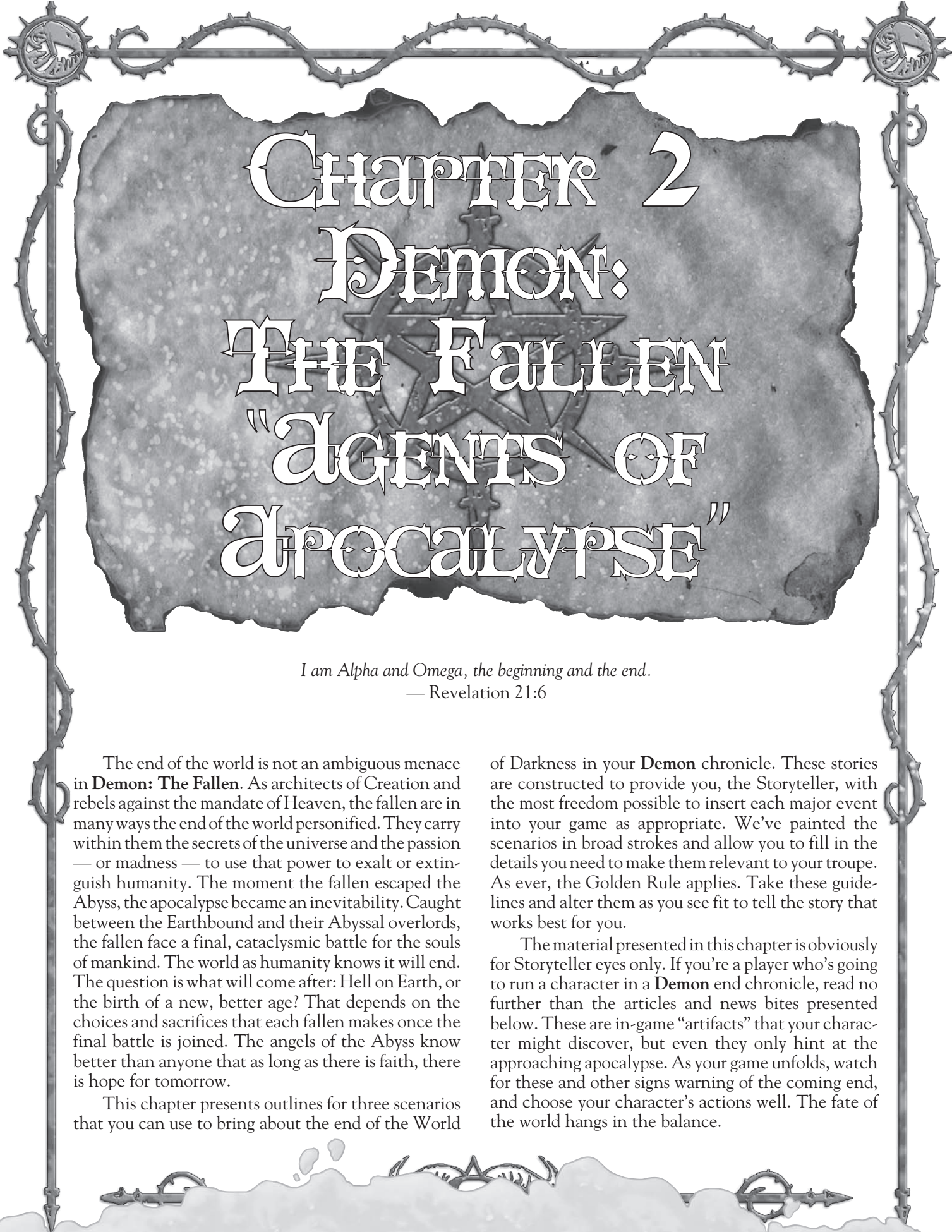
Any of these options could decide the fate your chronicle, and they can be combined with the scenarios provided or with your own. Of course, if you decide that the end is brought on by the assassination of High King David, then it's most logical to say that the fae damn themselves, rather than blaming it on humans. Deciding on a reason for the end strengthens your grasp of your chronicle and allows you to create a fitting framework for the characters' dying efforts.

Waking up

A world without dreams. It's a difficult concept to contemplate. A world where wishes and hopes don't exist. Where children don't throw coins into fountains or blow out their birthday candles. Where Santa Claus is never conceived and the space under a bed can only be empty. There's no music, only silence. Without hope, without longing, without delight, laughter and sorrow dry up and fade away. There's nothing left but a bleak existence that only becomes more so.

We hope that the plot devices and ideas presented in this chapter help you plan a spectacular chronicle, but they're ultimately just tools. If we are to take anything from the fae, it's that dreams are the heart of a story. Without them, a game becomes nothing more than a series of connected events gauged by probabilities. That is the challenge of **Changeling**. To dream. To hope. And, above all, to believe.





CHAPTER 2

DEMON: THE FALLEN "AGENTS OF APOCALYPSE"

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.
— Revelation 21:6

The end of the world is not an ambiguous menace in **Demon: The Fallen**. As architects of Creation and rebels against the mandate of Heaven, the fallen are in many ways the end of the world personified. They carry within them the secrets of the universe and the passion — or madness — to use that power to exalt or extinguish humanity. The moment the fallen escaped the Abyss, the apocalypse became an inevitability. Caught between the Earthbound and their Abyssal overlords, the fallen face a final, cataclysmic battle for the souls of mankind. The world as humanity knows it will end. The question is what will come after: Hell on Earth, or the birth of a new, better age? That depends on the choices and sacrifices that each fallen makes once the final battle is joined. The angels of the Abyss know better than anyone that as long as there is faith, there is hope for tomorrow.

This chapter presents outlines for three scenarios that you can use to bring about the end of the World

of Darkness in your **Demon** chronicle. These stories are constructed to provide you, the Storyteller, with the most freedom possible to insert each major event into your game as appropriate. We've painted the scenarios in broad strokes and allow you to fill in the details you need to make them relevant to your troupe. As ever, the Golden Rule applies. Take these guidelines and alter them as you see fit to tell the story that works best for you.

The material presented in this chapter is obviously for Storyteller eyes only. If you're a player who's going to run a character in a **Demon** end chronicle, read no further than the articles and news bites presented below. These are in-game "artifacts" that your character might discover, but even they only hint at the approaching apocalypse. As your game unfolds, watch for these and other signs warning of the coming end, and choose your character's actions well. The fate of the world hangs in the balance.

INSECT PLAGUE SIGN OF ARMAGEDDON, EXPERT CLAIMS

REUTERS, LONDON: THE RECENT INFLUX OF A PREVIOUSLY UNIDENTIFIED SPECIES OF CARNIVOROUS INSECT IS EVIDENCE OF DISASTER, ACCORDING TO NOTED ENTOMOLOGIST PHILIP OWEN. THE INSECTS INFESTING MUCH OF EUROPE AND RUSSIA HAVE BEEN CLASSIFIED AS OMNIPHAGUS MASTICANS, PART OF THE SAME FAMILY AS CICADAS, GRASSHOPPERS AND LOCUSTS. LIKE SWARMS OF GRASSHOPPERS IN YEARS PAST, THEY THREATEN TO DECIMATE THE YEAR'S CROPS AND CAUSE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN DAMAGE FOR FARMERS ACROSS THE CONTINENT. UNLIKE THEIR MORE FAMILIAR COUSINS, HOWEVER, THESE INSECTS AREN'T SHY ABOUT ATTACKING ANIMALS. EUROPEAN AGRICULTURAL OFFICIALS CONFIRM THAT IN CONTROLLED TESTING, THESE INSECTS SWARM OVER AN ANIMAL AND DEVOUR IT A BITE AT A TIME. "THEY'RE LIKE THE PIRANHAS OF THE INSECT WORLD," SAID EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES SPOKESPERSON AITHEA KRUGER. "WE HAVEN'T HAD ANY REPORTS OF HUMAN DEATHS OR SERIOUS INJURIES CAUSED BY THESE INSECTS, BUT IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME. COUNTLESS PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY SUFFERED SUPERFICIAL INJURIES FROM OMNIPHAGUS MASTICANS BITES."

WE ADVISE THE PUBLIC NOT TO TRAVEL ON FOOT THROUGH AFFECTED AREAS IF IT CAN BE AVOIDED."

DR. OWEN, FORMER PROFESSOR OF ENTOMOLOGY AT LONDON UNIVERSITY, HAS BEEN CONDUCTING HIS OWN RESEARCH INTO THESE PESTS, WITH SURPRISING RESULTS. HE CLAIMS THAT, AFTER CONSULTING WITH HISTORIANS AND THEOLOGICAL EXPERTS, HE HAS ESTABLISHED THAT THE INSECTS BESIEGING EUROPE ARE PREDICTED IN BIBLICAL TEXTS. HE CITES REVELATION CHAPTER 9, WHICH DISCUSSES A PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS WITH HUMAN FACES AND ANIMAL PARTS THAT WILL ATTACK THE UNRIGHTEOUS AND DESTROY ALL "WHO DO NOT HAVE THE SEAL OF GOD ON THEIR FOREHEADS." FORMER COLLEAGUES DISMISS DR. OWEN'S CLAIMS AS UNSCIENTIFIC HYSTERIA, AND POINT TO HIS CONNECTION TO THE RECENTLY DISCREDITED FUTURE SCIENTIARIS.

TO DATE, DR. OWEN HAS PRODUCED NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT HIS THEORY, AND DETRACTORS NOTE THAT AN ESTIMATED ONE MILLION SPECIES OF INSECTS REMAIN UNDISCOVERED AND UNIDENTIFIED ACROSS THE WORLD. DR. OWEN'S OFFICE HAS RELEASED AN OFFICIAL STATEMENT DECLARING THAT HIS RECENT RESEARCH HAS REVEALED ANOMALIES IN THE NEW SPECIES' GENETIC MAKEUP THAT IDENTIFIES IT AS THE CHIMERA-INSECTS OF BIBLICAL LEGEND. HIS FINDINGS WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL NATURE NEXT WEEK.

ECOLOGICAL DOOM AHEAD!

"ENJOY THIS SUMMER, BECAUSE IT COULD BE YOUR LAST." THAT'S THE MESSAGE FOR EUROPEANS IN THE LATEST REPORT FROM THE WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION. IT SEEMS THAT A CALAMITOUS WEATHER PATTERN FROM MILLENNIA PAST IS SET TO REAPPEAR SOON, PRESAGING DECADES OR CENTURIES OF FREEZING WINTERS AND CHILLY SUMMERS FOR MOST OF EUROPE.

THE GULF STREAM IS A MAJOR OCEAN CURRENT THAT FLOWS CLOCKWISE AROUND THE NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN, BEARING WARM WATER UP FROM FLORIDA AND THE GULF OF MEXICO INTO CHILLIER WATERS TO THE NORTH. THE WARM WATER COOLS AND SINKS NEAR GREENLAND AND SCANDINAVIA, CREATING A DOWNWELLING WHEREBY SURFACE WATER REACHES THE OCEANIC DEPTHS. THIS PROCESS, THOUGH SIMPLE, IS VITAL TO THE HEALTH OF OUR OCEANS. IT BRINGS OXYGEN AND SURFACE NUTRIENTS TO DEPTHS THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE COLD AND STERILE.

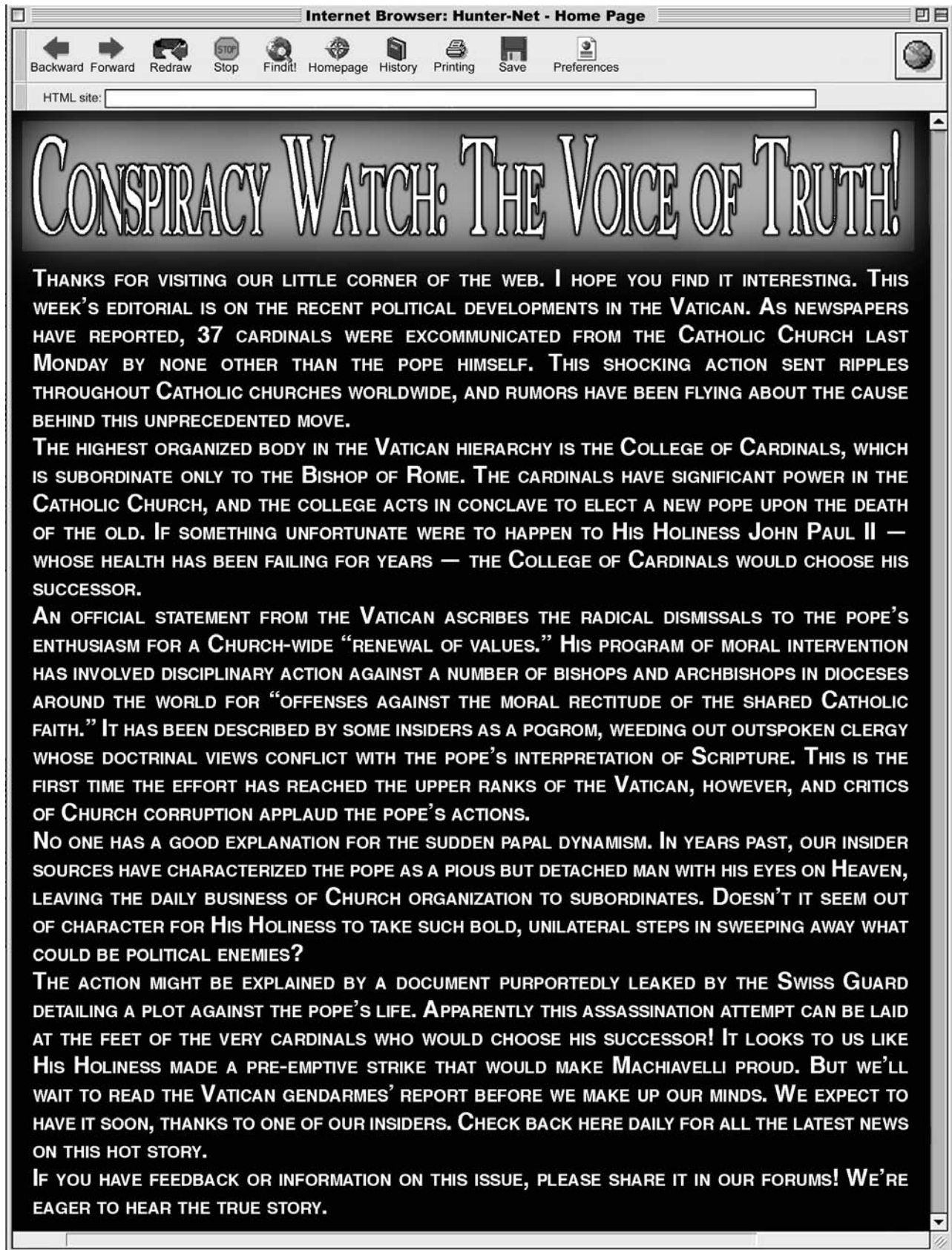
BUT IT'S NOT JUST THE DEEP OCEAN THAT'S AT RISK, ACCORDING TO THE WMO. REMAINING WARM WATER THAT DOESN'T SINK NEAR SCANDINAVIA GOES ON TO WARM NORTHERN EUROPE. OCEANOLOGISTS CALL THIS CYCLE THE "ATLANTIC CONVEYOR" AND IT PLAYS A MAJOR ROLE IN EUROPE'S CLIMATE. THE LAST TIME THE CYCLE FAILED WAS ELEVEN THOUSAND YEARS AGO, WHEN THE TEMPERATURE IN EUROPE DROPPED BY FIVE TO TEN DEGREES CELSIUS (NINE TO EIGHTEEN DEGREES FAHRENHEIT) FOR OVER A THOUSAND YEARS. CLIMATOLOGISTS HAVE HYPOTHESIZED THAT THIS PHENOMENON WAS DUE TO A GLACIAL MELTWATER LAKE THAT BROKE ITS ICE DAM AND DRAINED INTO THE NORTH ATLANTIC, REDUCING SALINITY AND PREVENTING THE SCANDINAVIAN DOWNWELLING. THE ATLANTIC CONVEYOR FROZE IN ITS TRACKS, AND SO DID EUROPE. THE TROUBLE IS THAT SCIENTISTS DON'T KNOW WHAT'S CAUSED THE CONVEYOR TO STOP THIS TIME. ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN NO REPORTED OCEANOGRAPHIC EVENTS THAT SEEM LIKE POSSIBLE CAUSES, THE CYCLIC TURNOVER OF THE DOWNWELLING HAS DIMINISHED BY FOUR PERCENT OVER THE LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS. IT'S AN UNPRECEDENTED SLOWDOWN, AND ONE THAT HAS EXPERTS BAFFLED.

"THERE'S NO OBVIOUS REASON BEHIND THE EFFECTS WE'VE OBSERVED," REPORTS WMO SCIENTIST DR. MORTEN BERG. "REPUTABLE DATA SHOWS THAT THE SALINITY OF THE REGION HASN'T CHANGED MEASURABLY. NOR HAVE WATER TEMPERATURES."

BUT AS THE DOWNWELLING SLOWS, THE GULF STREAM'S WATERS WON'T BE PULLED UP TO WARM EUROPE, AND WE'RE LOOKING AT COLD DAYS AHEAD."

SO, FOR OUR EUROPEAN READERS, IT'S TIME TO STOCK UP ON FIREWOOD AND INSULATE YOUR HOME. AS CROPS WITHER AND LIVESTOCK DIES IN FARMS ACROSS THE CONTINENT, THE HARD WEATHER TODAY IS ONLY A SIGN OF WHAT'S TO COME.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE CLEAR SKIES FOUNDATION. WHY NOT LOOK FOR MORE IN OUR INFORMATIVE BROCHURES? FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN DO YOUR PART TO HELP SAVE THE WORLD FROM ENVIRONMENTAL ABUSE.



THE YEAR IN REVIEW: EXTREMIST RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY MAKES A COMEBACK

As we look back over the past year, one trend becomes obvious: The worldwide spread of extremist ideological behavior has encroached on our shores. For years we've faced the threat of terrorism, ever since the Oklahoma City bombing — the first act of terrorism on American soil. This year saw a marked increase in such events, and responsibility was usually claimed by rightwing religious groups with Judeo-Christian roots. From the Sons of Sinai who demanded a return to traditional Jewish values to the fundamentalist Prophets of Enoch who claimed the end of the world was nigh, it seems this was prime time for militant ideologues. The spectacular event of the year was undoubtedly August's Faithful Lions protest against "liberal immoral policy makers" in Washington. The demonstration culminated in the tense siege in which a suicide bomber held a district court hostage for a day-and-a-half before being shot by police. Terrorist-style attacks aren't the only indicator of the winds of change, however. Police department figures in most American cities confirm that this

year saw more hate-crime attacks than any other since the racial strife of the mid-20th century.

There are no signs of the trend slowing, either. The FBI, NSA and other government security agencies continue to monitor potential threats from groups in North America. For years, our attention has been focused on cultures different from our own, and on the troubles of integration into a global culture. Now our gaze has shifted to hearth and home, where a new generation of zealots demands to be taken seriously. The FBI already investigates over two dozen domestic terrorist threats against New Year's Day celebrations, and as the new year dawns we must all ask ourselves what has prompted this shift in our own culture.

Though the recent violence is cause for concern, all is not lost. Most churches happily say that attendance is up, and that one-time worshippers return to the fold in droves. Perhaps next year will be the Year of Faith as we all take a look at how relevant our beliefs are in the modern world, and we find comfort in them anew.

UNNATURAL STORMS STRIKE, MAN OF FLAME WALKS THE STREETS!

That's right, the story no one is brave enough to print - except us! As seen here in this exclusive report, longtime reader Archie Williams has confirmed our previous reports of Grenada, Mississippi's "Man of Fire." Archie was passing through the state on a family road trip when he pulled over at a Grenada truck stop. He couldn't believe his eyes when sunny skies quickly clouded over and thunder rumbled in the distance. "Honest to God, it was a beautiful day and then all of a sudden the bottom was going to fall out," he told our reporter. "The sky went all green, like there was going to be a tornado. I told Emma and the kids to get in the store, and then I went back to get some of our things out of the truck. That's when I saw him."

What Archie saw would make anyone doubt their eyes, but he had the presence to grab his camera. These shocking photos are the result. The previously sunny sky was nearly black with ominous thunderclouds, and lightning crackled across the heavens. Rain was sheeting down, reducing visibility to almost zero, but one figure stood out - a solid flame, six feet tall, in the shape of a man.

"I never would have believed it if I didn't see it," Archie said. "Here it is, raining buckets and he - it - is just walking down the street, plain as day. I could see arms, legs, a head. No eyes or nose or mouth, but I guess if you're made of fire, you don't need any."

Archie said the figure walked up the highway toward the truck stop and the wind picked up, whipping around him like a twister was about to form. Then the figure raised its arms to the sky, and Archie says it shouted. "I couldn't make out what it was saying. It was like some foreign language. But there he was, hollering at the sky. You could hear him roaring over the wind, and that's saying something."

That was the last Archie saw of the man of flame. There was a crack of white light, as if the figure had been struck by lightning, and when Archie's vision cleared he was gone. And so were the thunderclouds, the sky clearing back to normal as quickly as it had clouded over.

"I went to see if there was anything left of him," Archie said. "But there was no one there. Just a dark patch on the road, and that was it." So, the truth is confirmed at last! As you can see from these photos, the man's existence is incontrovertible. The Bureau of Meteorology confirms that there were sudden storms in the northern Mississippi area that day.

Just remember, you read it here first in the Global Truth Weekly!

JOIN US TODAY — ASCEND TOMORROW!

Do you feel lost? Are you looking for companionship and guidance? In this world of chaos and strife, it can be hard to find a spiritual center that gives us meaning. With all the pressures of modern living, it's so easy to forget about what's important. We of the Enlightened Path know how you feel. We used to be just like you! We were always worried about whether we measured up, whether we were successful, whether we were doing the right thing with our lives. We're just like you and your friends — ordinary men and women trying to make our way in the world. Young, old, black, white, male, female, we of the Enlightened Path come from every background. We all have one thing in common, though. We have the comfort and serenity of the Enlightened Path to guide us through life's trials and tribulations. We work, learn and relax together, striving for a better future. We know where our path lies — into the Light — and every day we take one step closer to achieving our destiny among the stars. Do you want to know more? Do you want to know how you, too, can join us in this glorious quest to achieve the transcendent glory we were born for? Do you want to know the comfort of our leader Meseriel's spiritual guidance? Of course you do, and we're happy to answer all your questions. We understand that our peaceful, relaxed lifestyle may seem out of place in this hectic world, but don't worry, there's no catch. There's only peace and love here, and among the stars of our future lives. Call us today to find out how you can join us! We're happy to show you how we live, and the comfort and serenity you'll find when you join us. Call us today, and our wise elders will be happy to answer any questions you might have. A bright and beautiful future awaits you!

ATYPICAL VOLCANIC EVENTS ON NORTHWEST AMERICAN TECTONIC PLATE, WITH POTENTIAL HUMAN-FACTOR CAUSES.

Journal of Seismic and Volcanic Science; New York; vol.276; Diana C Smith; Hamish Macpherson; K Andrew Gillespie; D V Fletcher; et al;

ABSTRACT:

The recent volcanic eruptions in the Indonesian polyvulcan vent group do not follow the pattern of pressure buildup, explosive venting and secondary eruptions that is normally observed in multi-volcano explosion sequences. Further, such sequences of eruptions usually occur in a short space of time with one vent or over a long period of time with multiple vents. Data collected from on-site monitoring before the first eruption does not indicate any significant deviation in the chemical composition of volcanic emission from any of the Javanese vents in volcano group 0603, which includes all but one of the volcanoes that erupted during the relevant period. Seismic monitoring records several concussive shocks immediately prior to the sequence of eruptions in the 0602/0603 groups.

We show that the recorded concussions are incompatible with previously monitored pre-eruption seismic activity and that they are more consistent with records of blasts caused by human-created explosive devices. We show that the subsequent series of volcanic eruptions are unusual in their eruptive behavior and flows. More importantly we demonstrate that this series of volcanic eruptions could have been caused by the activation of a non-natural explosive or concussive device within a given vicinity of an unstable tectonic juncture, but placing such devices is beyond the scope of modern demolitions technology.

VIOLENT CRIME RATES RISE FOR THIRD QUARTER

AP, SYDNEY: The Australian Bureau of Statistics today released last quarter's law enforcement statistics for the whole nation, and with statewide breakdowns. It is the third quarter in a row to show an overall increase in violent crime rates. Each state has seen figures rise since this time last year, except Tasmania, which has held steady for the last two quarters and saw a dip prior to that. The new policy of releasing publicly available law enforcement statistics was introduced last year as a government program to encourage community responsibility for law and safety. Yet critics say the measure has backfired as the program has reported nothing but bad news and crime increases.

In New South Wales, violent crime this quarter was up by 11.5 percent. The worst categories were assaults, up by four percent from last quarter and ten percent from this time last year. All categories of violent crime saw increases, and a new category was introduced this quarter for hate-related crimes such as racial vilification, religious violence and assault on those with alternative lifestyles. Based on estimates from last year's crime data, this new class is already up eight percent from incidents of similar crimes (previously classified in other categories) last period.

These trends were mirrored in other states, with Victoria and Queensland both seeing significant jumps in the rate of sexual assault, armed robbery and road rage. The Northern Territory's figures were even worse, although the ABS report advised that they were artificially inflated by the race riots that swept Darwin last month, which resulted in thirty deaths and fires across the city.

"To be honest, we're stumped," said Commander James Lawler, recently appointed head of the National Committee on Violent Crime Control. "These figures are increasing at a dramatic rate, and there's no obvious reason. They're rising way ahead of population-growth figures." The NCVCC released a statement to confirm that the Australian Federal Police have conducted an investigation into the recent surge. The AFP's findings were inconclusive. They did not identify any link between the incidents, nor any common factors pointing to a single cause. "There's no rhyme or reason to this," said Commander Lawler at this morning's ABS conference. "It's like everyone has gone mad." He finished his address with a plea for renewed community vigilance and a promotion of the Neighborhood Watch and Crimestoppers civilian anti-crime programs.

Crisis in the Middle East

Anchor: We interrupt this program to bring you this special report. A state of emergency has been declared across much of the Middle East today, as hospitals across the region are inundated with victims of a sickness that is already being termed "a modern-day plague." The World Health Organization has few details about the ailment, which has apparently spread like wildfire across the entire Middle East and could extend to Europe and beyond.

The disease has been dubbed AHF, for Airborne Hemorrhagic Filovirus, although its source is unknown. Unconfirmed reports from the White House suggest that the epidemic could be the result of a biological weapon released as some kind of regional act of terror, although there's no consensus as to the perpetrator.

Virologists from the Centers for Disease Control, who flew in to examine the situation in Saudi Arabia, have made a preliminary identification of the disease as a filovirus, one of a family of virii that includes Ebola and the Marburg virus. Filovirii are relatively rare, leading to concerns that this is the air-vector mutation of Ebola feared and grimly anticipated by medical scientists since filovirii were first identified in 1976. We now go live to Saudi Arabia, where our news team investigates the story.

Reporter: There have been few reported fatalities in the early stages of this epidemic, but hundreds of victims are in hospitals, and medical authorities are already concerned that their capacity is inadequate for the number of patients who could arrive. Ebola Zaire, the most lethal filovirus known to date, has a ninety-percent fatality rate. Health organizations worldwide obviously hope that AHF proves a weaker strain.

Governments and health organizations are planning disaster-response scenarios. It's unknown how contagious or infectious the virus is, and authorities fear the worst. Most areas are enforcing a strict quarantine, and major airlines are turning away passengers without a medical clearance. Unconfirmed reports suggest overseas hubs are refusing to allow landings from airlines that don't require clearances. Law-enforcement agencies are also gearing up to protect against looters and rioters incited to panic. Several nations have called in military personnel, both for civil defense and in preparation for the war that so many expect tonight.

Anchor: Health authorities advise that anyone exhibiting unusual symptoms should see their doctor immediately. Signs of the virus include high fever, nausea, abdominal pain, coughing, nosebleeds and spontaneous bruising.

CREATING SIGNS OF THE APOCALYPSE

Apocalyptic texts from Revelation to the prophecies of Nostradamus are full of signs and portents that the end times are at hand. Weaving such images into your chronicle is an excellent means to build tension and gradually paint a picture of the unfolding apocalypse. Initial signs can be small and subtle, such as strange shifts in the weather — late season snows or especially severe summer storms that meteorologists are at a loss to explain. As events progress, people notice other signs that the natural world is growing increasingly unstable. Bizarre volcanic eruptions cause the seas to boil or they shower fire and brimstone down on cities. Animals lose their fear of man and find their way into dense urban areas, preying on the lost and homeless. As events gather speed, propelling the characters into the final days, reports increase in frequency and struggle to describe the supernatural. The skies rain blood. Cemeteries are found empty of the dead. The moon is full night after night.

Signs and portents are effective storytelling tools, because they heighten characters' awareness that events have global implications. As the size and scope of omens increase, they raise the ante — it's clear that time is running out, and the characters must act now or not at all. It's an effective way of hinting at the significance of events yet still maintaining an aura of mystery and mounting danger.

This section contains tips and guidelines for creating signs and portents specific to your **Demon** chronicle — specifically, omens focusing on the Earthbound, the Greater Demons and Lucifer himself.

OMENS OF THE EARTHBOUND

Of all the demons, the Earthbound are the best integrated into human society. Their activities trigger all manner of strange events in the mundane world that canny fallen may recognize. Although the Earthbound are usually masters of indirect action, there's only so much plotting they can do without creating ripples for observers to notice.

Mortal Society. The biggest indicator of Earthbound activity at the end is the behavior of the social institutions they control. Hint at these spirits' increasing influence and ultimate agenda by having various mortal power structures change attitudes. Under Earthbound sway, governments become cruel and authoritarian. (And at the same time, favored thralls get away with astonishing breaches of the law.) Fallen resources are targeted for sabotage or destruction. Companies are nationalized. Allies are arrested, discredited or killed in "accidents." Lucrative corporations are bought out or dissolved. These alarming events



don't need to target the players' characters directly, although they should suggest that something sweeping is happening behind the scenes, and it's not good.

Earthbound Activity. As the Earthbound prepare to launch their bid for ultimate power, most of them are concerned with securing bases and making delicate strategic moves. The Earthbound are the oldest power-players on Earth. Entities so canny aren't interested in taking unnecessary risks on the eve of success. Fallen who've observed the Earthbound likely recognize that their direct activity is more careful and restrained than ever. Previously active spirits may even fall silent altogether; a veritable quiet before the storm. At this stage, none of the fallen are in a position to see the whole picture, so changes in Earthbound behavior are simply another clue that something big is going on — or about to happen.

OMENS OF THE ABYSS

If your end of the world involves the most powerful demons breaking their bonds, they trigger their own signs and portents. The symptoms are most obvious within demonic society itself.

Demonic Atrocities. As more and more powerful demons escape the Abyss, they go unrestrained by any of the humanity that saved the fallen from perdition. Reports trickle in of atrocities perpetrated by identified demonic powers. These should be events that would normally drown a demon in Torment, making it clear that no ordinary being performs them. Increase the frequency of these events as your Judgment story arc approaches, intensifying the sense that something calamitous builds, but try not to reveal the specific nature of the high-ranking demons until necessary.

Master and Servant. The most powerful demons are served by fallen subordinates, beings ordered to secure freedom for their masters at any cost. As your story unfolds, these agents' activities increase. Characters may not know these demons' specific motives, but the agents are busy trying to free their masters and establish a strong power base that will protect their Abyssal lords upon their return. Preparations lead to infighting in the infernal courts, as servants squabble over resources. Such events should be interspersed with reports of the demonic atrocities discussed above. The characters thus get a feeling of impending doom rather than being handed all the clues on a silver platter.

OMENS OF LUCIFER

As with the Earthbound, Lucifer's power rests in the mortal world. With the end of the world at hand, he prepares for his last crusade and the effects of growing faith are obvious. Lucifer may not wish to reveal himself until he's ready, but he must take some steps to prepare humanity to fight against his former brethren.

Evangelism. Growing faith in the world leads to any number of signs. Financial contributions to religious groups are way up. Church attendance is the highest it's been in centuries. "Strong moral values" are on the comeback. The shift should be sudden enough that the characters notice it, but it shouldn't be so blatant that fallen feel compelled to investigate immediately. The momentum does suggest a culmination, however, as if something is about to burst.

The Supernatural. The collective faith of so much humanity may engender "miracles." This is the place to employ biblical prophecies and supernatural signs. Statues of saints cry blood, while people witness haloes and wings on previously ordinary folks. Whether these are hysterical visions or true manifestations of faith is up to you, but as with all omens of the end, they set the scene for doom or destiny.

TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

"Twilight of the Gods" explores one of the central themes of **Demon**: devotion to a cause, even one that seems hopeless. In this scenario, the world is brought to the brink of destruction by a most unlikely alliance. The Earthbound, demonic monsters who claim the Earth as their own, unite against the intruding fallen. The resulting struggle shatters the world no matter who triumphs. The question is, do the characters stand against the Dread Kings regardless of the odds? Is it better to die as an angel than live eternity as a demon?

The fallen cannot remain aloof any longer. Every demon must choose her own fate and resolve how she wishes to be remembered by history — if anyone is left to remember. The characters have to decide whether their place is standing against the wave of destruction, or acceding to the inevitable and wresting what power they can in the world's final days.

Throughout history, the Earthbound have been each other's worst enemies. Selfish and Machiavelian, few have brooked any intrusion by others of their kind. They have fought tooth and nail over every prize. Cooperation between these monsters, as in the case of ancient Rome, has been the exception rather than the rule — until now. Faced with competition from the newly freed fallen, the reawakened Earthbound are forced to set aside their feuds and destroy the fallen before the newcomers grow too strong to overcome.

OVERVIEW

This scenario is less about the battles characters fight than the choices they make as Armageddon unfolds. The best they can hope for in a battle against the Earthbound is a Pyrrhic victory, with the few

survivors heir to a ruined world and a human race on the verge of extinction. The alternative is to abandon former peers and join the ranks of the Dread Kings' infernal servants. The latter offers a much greater chance of survival, and even the possibility of earthly rewards once the battle is won, but at what cost to the characters' souls?

There are two main courses for running this scenario as the finale of a **Demon** chronicle. The first makes the characters actively involved in the fate of the world from the outset, allowing their actions to drive the story and the fate of reality. The characters recognize the momentum building during an early encounter with the Earthbound, and they can choose how to pursue the clues before them. This path is well suited to action-oriented, epic games of bravery and bloodshed.

The second path presents the characters with each major milestone on the road to destruction as a separate, isolated event with few clues as to the greater cataclysm looming. An insightful character might uncover hints and suggestions along the way, but she has to work hard to discover more than the basics. Characters might also notice a pattern to events, but by the time they have enough pieces to perceive the puzzle there may not be much time left to act. This approach calls for milestone events to be interspersed among other, unrelated story development. This approach is better suited to mystery-oriented games with more uncertainty and horror than battles.

THE RISE OF THE OLD GODS

The characters may have had run-ins with the Earthbound and their minions before. This scene is meant to reveal the first signs that the Dread Kings increase their efforts to control key positions in governments and corporations. The characters should come away from this stage with troubling hints that the Earthbound actually seem to be working together.

The central element here is the meteoric rise of a man or woman into a position of power or influence in the characters' home territory. Perhaps the city's mayor is forced out of office in the wake of a sudden, devastating scandal, and a dark-horse candidate literally comes out of nowhere to win a special election with a mixture of political skill and magnetic charm. Or an individual with a mediocre education and limited business experience manages to pull off the hostile takeover of a powerful corporation. The Earthbound thrall could be a complete unknown, or better yet someone the characters have known quite well over the course of the chronicle and have routinely dismissed for one reason or another. Choose the circumstances and cast member who is the most appropriate to your chronicle, so long as the position and person are sufficiently odd

that they gain the characters' attention. If the characters don't notice (or the players simply write the person off as another demon's minion and go about their business), you can have the thrall use his newfound power and influence in a way that impacts the characters' mortal lives. Perhaps the new mayor uses his authority to enact draconian city ordinances that target areas where the local court has influence. Or the corporate exec buys contacts at city hall and acquires properties belonging to local demons. Have the thrall take actions intended to undermine the local court, including the characters.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The thrall has been chosen by one of the Earthbound to build a power base in the characters' home territory. The Dread King may or may not be aware of the presence of fallen in the area — it may simply be out to grab wealth and influence as a stepping stone to other, bigger things.

The characters may not choose to investigate the minion at first. Let them continue with their own agendas while the agent builds a foundation, extending his influence into other parts of the city's government and business. If the characters aren't interested in the thrall, it's possible that members of the local court or a ministry asks the characters to look into the intruder's past (see "Involving the Characters," below).

If the characters still refuse to investigate, that's fine. Someone inevitably does, and resulting discoveries will be big enough that the characters hear second-hand, at the least.

Any exploration of the thrall reveals the following details. He is, in fact, the servant of a powerful Earthbound demon. This is an alarming revelation all by itself, but to make matters worse, careful scrutiny of the thrall's records reveals that his rise to power was financed primarily by loans, gifts and powerful insider connections of a network of similar thralls scattered across the country. As well placed as the thrall is locally, he is only a part of something much more bigger — something growing.

MAJOR PLAYERS

The two major players at this stage are the thrall and his Earthbound master. You can spin the Earthbound in one of two ways: as a distant, almost disinterested antagonist, or you can lay the groundwork here to make the Dread King a prominent antagonist for the rest of the chronicle. Either approach has its advantages. Making the spirit distant and anonymous makes this episode ominous and creepy. The characters play a tiny role in something much larger and more threatening. What could await them? Conversely, using this scenario as a

springboard to introduce a recurring antagonist helps build continuity and focuses the characters' future conflicts on a single foe, which makes the battle that much more personal.

As stated previously, the thrall can be a total stranger, but it works best if he's someone they've gotten to know over the course of the chronicle and never thought much about until now. That makes the thrall's change all the more dynamic, and adds a level of tragedy to the situation. The characters find themselves pitted against a former friend or acquaintance, or someone whom they could have dealt with before, once and for all.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

There are any number of ways to immerse the characters into the thrall's investigation. The first and most likely is simple curiosity — the circumstances of his sudden rise scream infernal influence. Fallen with a stake in the region may want to know who this new competitor is. Another possibility is that the thrall's actions directly affect the characters' agents or other mortals for whom the fallen feel responsible. Perhaps the thrall-CEO lays off half the town, compelling the characters to try to save the livelihoods of their associates. Or the thrall-mayor enacts laws that allow the police to persecute segments of the population who just happen to be thralls of the fallen. Finally, if the characters have an affiliation with the local court they may be asked to look into the situation by superiors, or ordered to remove the threat before the troublemaker can gain too much power.

FALLOUT

The most important outcome of this episode is that the characters glimpse the growing web of influence that the Earthbound constructs. The fallen get some hints as to the Dread King's identity (and possibly its general location), but its overriding agenda remains a mystery. If the characters attempt to remove the thrall from his position, the Earthbound is willing to sacrifice its pawn rather than expend resources to oppose the characters. If the thrall is driven off or killed, the Earthbound pulls back, taking notes and biding its time until it can counterattack.

DAMAGE CONTROL

The only thing that can really go wrong at this early stage is if the characters completely ignore the thrall, regardless of temptation or requests. If they choose this course, you can leave the thrall in place to amass power and later compile information on the local fallen, or you can have another group of demons confront and destroy him. If you choose the latter, the characters may learn about the agent's Earthbound ties through associates.

CHAINS OF SLAVERY

The second part of this scenario develops months after the first, ideally after the characters' (and players') fears of the Dread King have been supplanted by other concerns. Though the characters may have driven the thrall from his position of power or destroyed him, his master has not been idle, continuing to build a network and establishing ties with other spirits in the region. Now it has forged an alliance with another of the Dread Kings to stage a lightning raid on the characters' home territory to gather slaves and take revenge.

The raid is the first real test of the alliance between the two Old Gods. The first being provides crucial information about the local fallen, while its ally contributes a number of experienced hunting parties to capture prey. The hunters' orders are to capture as many fallen as possible and take them to designated holding areas to await enslavement. Any targets that prove too tough to capture are to be banished.

If the characters simply investigated the Dread King's thrall in the previous episode, but otherwise left him alone or ignored him altogether, they now have good reason to regret their decision. If they did succeed in taking him out, his master has since gathered information through covert reconnaissance.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The raid takes the local fallen completely by surprise. Hunting parties strike simultaneously at nearly a dozen different individuals, capturing most and banishing the rest. The mortals are careful to target relatively weak demons in the area, going for the easiest prey at the least cost to themselves. At first, the local court is thrown into chaos and the attackers take advantage of the confusion to pull down yet more victims. The mortals strike in shifts, some operating by day, others by night in order to keep the fallen reeling. It's only a matter of time before they try their luck with the characters.

The general strategy of hunting parties is to keep the local fallen on the defensive with aggressive, round-the-clock tactics. As soon as the demons in the area manage a serious, organized response, the raiders pull out, taking slaves with them and banishing any other prisoners they haven't been able to break. (For details on the enslavement process, see Chapter Four of *Demon*.)

MAJOR PLAYERS

Primary participants here are the Earthbound from the previous episode and its new ally. Characters are likely to learn about the latter only by inference during the course of the raid or upon talking to rescued captives. If the thrall from the previous scene was not driven

off, he assumes covert control of the hunting parties and becomes a major participant as well. If he's a corporate figure, it's likely that captured demons are taken to warehouses or industrial facilities that he controls.

Hunting parties are comprised mainly of thralls from the Dread King's new ally, although some servants of both are included in each team to share the risks (and to ensure that captured slaves are shared evenly). One way to suggest that there are two Earthbound at work is to have the thralls of each demon manifest distinct mutations that suggest two separate factions operating together.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

If the characters don't take an active hand in confronting and defeating the raiders, there are a number of ways to get them involved. If they owe any loyalty to the local court they could be ordered to go after the invaders and rescue hostages. If they aren't the sort to take orders, they might feel compelled to retrieve friends or companions. If all else fails, the characters' names show up on the attackers' list sooner rather than later.

FALLOUT

Captured fallen are held in carefully warded enclosures that keep them from being tracked, or from participating in invocations. That said, there should only be a handful of places in the area where the raiders can discretely imprison several dozen demons *and* perform binding rituals on them. The characters have to find the prisoners by mundane means, but the list of likely locales is short. Finding the victims is fairly easy. Fighting past numerous guards to perform a rescue is the hard part. The raiders expect attempts by small groups of fallen. The solution, then, is to get a *large* group of fallen together and take the prison by storm.

With time running out, the characters must assemble as many demons as they can to stage a mass assault on the holding area. Doing so should involve a lot of negotiation and diplomacy on the characters' part, possibly even striking hasty truces with old adversaries in order to get the job done. Such bridge-building is important, because it increases the characters' standing in the aftermath, granting them some notoriety and respect. It also forces local fallen to deal with the Earthbound problem with a (mostly) unified front.

The attack on the holding area should culminate in a grand battle that could go either way until one of the fallen manages to break the wards holding the prisoners. The raiders attempt to flee. If the characters haven't yet realized that two Earthbound are behind the attack, allow one or more enemy thralls to be taken prisoner and reveal what's going on after a lengthy interrogation. Not only do they divulge that the Dread

Kings are working together, but that similar efforts are being carried out across the world. What began as a local problem suddenly assumes global implications.

DAMAGE CONTROL

The easiest way to keep this episode on track is to keep the characters moving. The pace is frantic, with squads of kidnappers harrying demons all over the city. If the characters are tempted to wander off on tangents or do something completely inappropriate, don't give them time to think. Throw dangers at them and keep them busy to maintain their focus.

If bad luck dogs the characters and they're taken by Earthbound forces, they can be rescued by other demons or can try to escape on their own. Outside rescue should be a last resort. Keep the focus on the characters by giving them subtle opportunities to strike against their captors (perhaps freeing other demons at the same time). The resources of a junior Earthbound could easily be stretched thin by keeping numerous fallen imprisoned at one time, and defenses have a weak point somewhere.

SCORCHED EARTH

The Earthbound raid and its implications of broader, concerted efforts by the Dread Kings spurs high-ranking fallen to warn other courts. The ministries launch a number of investigations aimed at uncovering the scope of the enemy alliance, potentially involving the characters. Over a period of months, word spreads to fallen courts across the globe, and information accumulates to paint a picture of Earthbound conspiracy. But just as the fallen begin to uncover the Dread Kings' agenda, an insidious counteroffensive is launched, striking not at the fallen themselves, but at their thralls and mortal holdings.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The Earthbound effort is intended to distract the fallen from their investigations and to weaken their power base. Hunting parties stage fast, destructive raids to destroy people and property. At this stage, minions do not act against the fallen themselves, but focus on mundane resources. At the same time, the Earthbound ply political influence to weaken demons' standing, damaging their mortal credibility and making the targets vulnerable to future attack or corruption.

Many fallen are weakened significantly as their crutches in the mortal world are denied them. The characters — indeed, all of the fallen — are undoubtedly on the defensive for several weeks or even months. Keep the characters reacting, running around their networks and holdings putting out fires. Just as they solve one problem, another crops up. A valued informant goes missing. Just as a character rescues him, she's



notified that her assets have been seized pending an IRS audit. Once she's talked or bribed her way out of that situation, rioters loot the warehouses of her shipping company and take the expensive computer hardware inside.

The purposes of these events are manifold. They create a global problem that draws courts together. The campaign knocks the fallen off-balance and keeps them there, placing the overall advantage in the hands of the Dread Kings. The fallen (and characters) are encouraged to revisit their feelings toward humanity, as their thralls and possibly loved ones are targeted by the enemy.

MAJOR PLAYERS

The most prominent figures of this chapter are Earthbound agents who use their power to undermine the fallen. These can be corporate or government figures who challenge or shut down various enterprises. Minions could also be military or police who organize strike teams to destroy the foundations of "dangerous terrorists."

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

If the characters have managed to avoid events up to this point, they have little choice but to get involved now as their thralls are targeted. Carefully cultivated resources evaporate before their eyes. Contacts ignore

them. Allies vanish. Bank accounts dry up, all of which is enough to rouse any demons to action. If the characters have actively opposed the Earthbound all along, they are the objects of special focus by the Dread Kings' hit squads.

FALLOUT

This scenario should make it painfully clear how far the influence of the Earthbound extends. The Dread Kings' thralls aren't just fringe cultists in blood-splattered basements. They're stockbrokers, politicians and judges. Through them, the Earthbound have the power to make the characters' lives very uncomfortable. It's at this point that most demons realize that the Earthbound are on the move to seize the world (assuming they haven't already). What the fallen choose to do about it is up to them. You can increase the tension by having a representative of an Earthbound approach a character who might sway in his resolve to defend the world. Power and safety is offered in return for joining the "winning team."

DAMAGE CONTROL

The worst-case scenario here is if the characters give up or actively join the Earthbound. If the former situation seems likely, give the characters some avenues to fight back. Perhaps they can go to the media with information on a corrupt politician who makes

their lives hell, or they find a way to conceal their thralls. The aim is to stress and harry the characters, not to dishearten the players to the point of quitting.

If one or more of the characters chooses to join the Earthbound, the Dread Kings demand half of a character's True Name as a gesture of fealty. If this still doesn't dissuade him, the Earthbound seeks to use the fallen as a spy and eventual traitor once the full battle has been joined. By that point, it's likely that the Dread Kings have the character's full True Name. This situation creates the possibility of great tension and drama as the rest of the scenario unfolds and the character wrestles with his decision. Once the character has sold out, the only way to redemption is to sacrifice himself in some heroic fashion, thus returning to the Abyss and out of the Dread Kings' grasp.

THE IRON FIST

If the fallen haven't extrapolated local troubles to a global scale, they do by the end of this episode. In an extension of the previous chapter, world governments enact oppressive anti-terrorist measures, initiating a witch hunt against "public enemies" who are demons' closest allies.

The extent of Earthbound influence over mortal government, and therefore the world, becomes apparent when seemingly independent authorities target fallen thralls, largely with circumstantial or false evidence. The most important mortal power structures are firmly under Earthbound control, and no longer maintain even the pretence of fairness or impartiality.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The Earthbound have nearly finished spinning their web of secular and mortal power. They wield these weapons against the fallen, rooting out and neutralizing groups of mortals who provide power and faith. Meanwhile, the Dread Kings' influence is sufficient to ensure that their own followers have virtual diplomatic immunity.

MAJOR PLAYERS

Again, many of the major figures here are mortal power-players. Other fallen are too busy protecting their own assets and thralls to have much overt impact on the characters. The characters may also want to be careful; any drastic actions might attract all the more attention to them and their own supporters.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

Faced with an attack on the sources of their faith, combined with apparent Earthbound interference in governments worldwide, the characters must work to protect themselves and save what they can or be subject to destruction. The characters can react to this

threat in a variety of ways. Socially oriented beings might counter the measures politically and seek to have them lifted. Others might manipulate independent authorities to turn the campaign on Earthbound assets. Demons could seek to slip under the radar by bribing or blackmailing officials to ignore their followers. Characters who favor investigation can turn their scrutiny on world governments to learn just how far Earthbound corruption reaches.

FALLOUT

The characters can choose to be aggressive at this stage, attacking Earthbound followers in an eye-for-an-eye struggle. Depending on the target in question, reaction is frenzied aggression to remove the characters before they can do any more harm, or a cautious retreat from public scrutiny to lick wounds and bide time before striking back. Whether the fallen take the fight to the Earthbound or not, they're run ragged by defending the mortals with whom they've forged pacts.

Even the most careful and meticulous fallen are provoked to action by attacks against their power bases, and by proof that the Earthbound are positioned far more insidiously than anticipated. It's time for the characters to defend what's theirs, to remove the Dread Kings before they can do any further harm.

DAMAGE CONTROL

It's fairly easy to keep the characters from throwing the story too far off track when you've got the resources of all the world's governments with which to confront them. The biggest risk at this point is that the characters could make enough of nuisance of themselves that the Earthbound must take decisive action. At some point, it's no longer plausible for the Earthbound to "let the characters off the hook" without good reason. Fallen who get too troublesome may be arrested or accosted just like their thralls. Yet, the Earthbound still see the fallen as potential slaves, and prefer not to exhaust such potential resources until they must.

STRIKING BACK

After suffering so many attacks and abuses, the fallen decide it's time to strike back before their assets are eroded to nothing and their strength dwindles irrecoverably. Although it's not a unanimous decision, infernal courts and factions all over the world reach the same conclusion: They must strike the enemy with all the power they have left, before it's too late to act.

The war is intended to be a multi-pronged effort. Manipulative demons will work to undermine the Dread Kings' support networks, while champions of the War of Wrath will assault the strongholds and fortresses of the beings themselves.

The plan is risky, but it's the only option remaining. If the Earthbound aren't stopped, their former comrades will fall before them and then no one will remain to protect the world from the menace and oppression of the ancient spirits.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The fallen are desperate at this point, but believe they still hold the upper hand by virtue of numbers. What they do not know is that the Earthbound have used their worldwide influence to infiltrate governments, militaries and police agencies to a much greater degree than the fallen realize. What's more, they have several traitors hidden within the fallen camp, leaking vital information. When the fallen strike, they face not only the Earthbound and their agents but literally armies of deceived mortals. What begins as a glorious final assault ends in defeat for the fallen.

MAJOR PLAYERS

As demons are involved in a cooperative global effort, the big names among them emerge to lead the host for the first time since the rebellion. Feel free to include any of the heroes of the War of Wrath here, as described in *City of Angels* or *Houses of the Fallen*. (An interesting side story for the characters might be the search for a lost leader of great renown who is believed to have returned to Earth. To further complicate the story, the leader may have succumbed partially to his Torment, putting the characters in the difficult position of recruiting *and* redeeming him.)

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

When every fallen across the world is called to arms, it shouldn't be too hard to involve the characters in the coming battle. By this point they should have a number of scores to settle and lost friends to avenge, plus their liege lords in court are certain to ask for their assistance and expertise. Failing that, there is the issue of basic survival. If the fallen lose, the characters are faced with an eternity of servitude, assuming they aren't simply eaten first. Characters who have sold out to the Earthbound are commanded to join the army and betray any battle plans to the Dread Kings.

As the fallen move to battle, old legion allegiances may assert themselves. The courts are for governing. The factions are for politics and ideology. But the legions are tools of war. As their day dawns again, many fallen gravitate toward their comrades from the war rather than to those of later alliances. That could mean long-time rivals suddenly become compatriots, and old friends find themselves in opposite camps.

Make sure to keep the characters centrally involved in events rather than relegating them to the status of spear-carriers. By this point they're likely to be

fairly experienced with the powers and capabilities of the Earthbound, and their efforts against the Dread Kings may have garnered them considerable renown. They might be chosen as champions of their respective legions or courts, as grand strategists for the host, or they might serve as vital mediators who use their prestige to keep the fractious army unified.

FALLOUT

If any of the characters have switched allegiances and joined the Earthbound, they are pressured to leak any sensitive plans to their real masters. By this point the Dread Kings know the True Names of their defectors, and use them to command obedience. (See Chapter Nine, p. 255, of the *Demon* rulebook for more details on the effects of True Names.) If a character complies, his information is used to assist in the defeat of the fallen.

The fallen's initial attacks seem to be successful, but quickly encounter sharp resistance. What was intended as a campaign of lightning-fast surgical strikes bogs down as each target turns out to be defended by alert and determined mortal and Earthbound fighters. Realizing that they have gone too far to stop now, the fallen throw their reserves into the fray and strikes turn into pitched battles. Fighting spills out into the streets in full view of horrified mortals. Powerful rituals sear the skies and roil the earth. Casualties mount by the hour as increasingly powerful weapons are brought to bear. An operation that should have taken mere hours drags out into days, and cities across the world become funeral pyres.

Eventually it becomes clear that all is lost. The demons' desperate gambit has failed. Instead of striking a knockout blow, the Earthbound have lured the host into an open conflict that the fallen have no hope of winning. Now it's only a matter of time and attrition, while the world burns.

DAMAGE CONTROL

The war being fought leads to a final battle, addressed below. Gains or losses suffered now have little impact on the final confrontation to come. Try to avoid excessive character casualties by giving the group a specific role, say targeting a single Earthbound that operates behind the U.S. government. That way characters may have the opportunity to see — and be central to — the last stand.

TWILIGHT FALLS

As the fallen struggle through their ill-fated campaign against the Earthbound, skies burn and seas boil. The Earthbound offer no quarter and demons find themselves in the final confrontation they'd hoped to avoid.

Earthbound thralls and minions attack from all sides, while their masters enact horrifying rituals from the safety of their strongholds and bastions. Though fewer in number than the fallen, the Dread Kings have literal armies of mortals to hurl against the infernal host, dragging demons down under the weight of bodies if necessary.

As the battle rages, the numbers of the fallen dwindle. Though they are not without resources of their own, from human cults to mutinous army units to government agents, they can't prevail against the Dread Kings' forces. For every enemy human or infernal servant disposed of, 10 more take his place. The damned cannot prevail and there is nowhere to retreat. Yet surrender is unthinkable. The fallen can only fight to the last, trying to take as many of the foe into the Abyss with them as possible.

As demons become increasingly desperate, every battleground is wracked by the most powerful evocations of each lore. Reminiscent of the most spectacular battles of old, caution is thrown to the winds — survival first, discretion later. Feel free to pull out all the stops on both sides, because this is most demons' last chance to use the mightiest powers at their disposal. From winged figures with flaming swords to teams of modernized demons with assault rifles and body armor to powerful rituals and cataclysmic evocations, this last battle has it all.

BEHIND THE SCENES

There is one option left to the remainder of the host. While they cannot defeat the Earthbound at this point, they *can* deny them victory. Now that the Earthbound are fully committed to battle, their hidden sanctums blaze with energy and are visible for all to see. By attacking the Earthbound directly with the most powerful weapons left at their disposal — possessed relics, nuclear weapons, mass rituals — the fallen might be able to pull down the Dread Kings' reliquaries before being overwhelmed. The cost is certain to be terrible. Many demons would likely be utterly destroyed in the monumental release of energy. And humanity, if it survived at all, would be reduced to a fraction of its number scattered and suffering across a blasted world.

But what's the alternative? Eternal slavery to the Earthbound. Humanity preserved as nothing more than grist for terrible rituals as the Dread Kings remake the universe in their own image. An utter perversion of everything that mattered about the fall.

The characters should be the first to reach this grim conclusion. They should be the first to debate their choices amid the carnage of apocalyptic war. If they decide it's better to die as angels than to live as

demons, it's up to them to convince the rest of the host of the same. It will be their finest hour.

MAJOR PLAYERS

Every demon and every Earthbound, and a lot of mortals as well. Even the most monstrous of the recent Abyssal escapees — the most powerful of the fallen — may be reminded of their angelic nature when faced with the evil of the Earthbound. This is a time for every former hero to prove herself worthy of her name.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

The characters are the first to grasp the one tactic that may defeat the Earthbound, if they have the courage to attempt it. If they choose to act, there are a number of crucial roles they can play in the outcome of the battle. The challenge of convincing the rest of the host to sacrifice themselves for the sake of love and honor falls to the characters. They have to pull out every vestige of rank, reputation, skill and logic at their command to win over their allies.

If the characters don't feel they're up to the challenge, they can entrust the insight to other fallen and take up an equally bold endeavour. Perhaps finding a way to preserve as many mortals as they can from the final battle that is about to occur. If they follow this course, they will have to shield their mortal flock from the whirlwind unleashed by the host. When the smoke finally clears they will be the shepherds of a tiny, frightened band of survivors in a ruined land, with nothing left but to begin again.

If the characters elect to simply keep on fighting and hope for the best — or worse, surrender to the Earthbound in hopes of cutting a deal — the final defeat of the fallen comes to pass. The host is broken beneath wave after wave of human cannon fodder, and the survivors are hauled off to pens to await enslavement. The Earthbound rise from their reliquaries, their astral forms looking out over the wasted landscape and pronouncing it a good beginning.

FALLOUT

No matter who triumphs, the world is broken, perhaps forever. Humanity is all but annihilated, plunged into a dark age from which it will not recover without aid. It is either the end of all things, or the start of a new, sombre day.

If the fallen carry the battle to the Earthbound and the characters lead the way, there should be many opportunities for heroism and glory. Maybe the characters are tasked with carrying a nuclear device to the foot of Belial's reliquary, or they hold off the ravening hordes of Dagon to buy time for the vast ritual that will turn his mountain sanctum to glass. Characters who turned traitor have the opportunity to redeem them-

selves with a grand sacrifice. Virtually all of the characters should give their lives. Whether they are borne back to the Abyss or lost forever depends on the circumstances and the tone with which you want to end the chronicle.

If you want to continue your game past the final battle, feel free to have the characters survive, even if by all rights they should have been destroyed. They find themselves in a ruined world, spared by fate — or perhaps a merciful God — to take mankind by the hand and build again, having expiated their sin of rebellion in a final act of sacrifice.

INVOLVING THE MORNINGSTAR

Lucifer is a central figure in every story about demons, often as notable by his absence as by his presence. He is unlikely to let the end of the world pass without getting involved. He has closer ties to the world than any other demon, having lived through all of its history without surcease. If you wish to introduce Lucifer as a power-player in this story, here are suggestions for appropriate points at which to do so.

Watched by the Morningstar. If the characters are proactive and visible at the forefront of fallen investigations into the Earthbound threat, they are noticed by Lucifer. He may reveal himself to them, probably through agents, and offers to share resources. This gives you a way to direct the characters' focus and activities without Lucifer overwhelming the plot.

Hunting the Morningstar. The characters may decide that they need powerful allies against the Earthbound. In the absence of their own superiors still trapped in the Pit, the only demon with the power to advise and guide them is their former leader. The characters may have dealings with the Luciferan faction, which is considered closest to finding the truth of the missing Morningstar. If you wish to introduce Lucifer this way, the characters may be approached by Luciferans and persuaded to help search for him, which puts the faction in the characters' debt when they need allies most.

Hunted by the Morningstar. As battle escalates and the world recognizes the supernatural struggle looming, Lucifer cannot help but be aware of the crisis. Dismayed by the lack of foresight demons display, and horrified by any reluctance to take up arms against the Earthbound, the Morningstar perceives the fallen as just as much a threat to the world as the Dread Kings. Lucifer is likely to allow the Earthbound and fallen to harm each other as much as possible, while he protects the rest of the world from the excesses of both. He may be sighted at conflicts that spill out into the world at large, doing his best to contain combatants and shield humanity from collateral damage. If the fallen wish to

sway Lucifer, they have to prove that they're not the monsters that the Earthbound are, that they're willing to serve as the angels they once were.

BETTER TO RULE ON EARTH

"Better to Rule on Earth" is an endgame scenario that focuses on the ultimate escape of the greater demons of the Abyss and their struggle for dominion over the world. Life on Earth goes on and the characters are responsible much as they were when they were angels, seeking to protect humanity. By the time the chronicle ends, all the basic rules and assumptions of **Demon** change. If play continues, which is possible if you so choose, the characters undergo truly transformative experiences (perhaps even their True Names change) and it is no longer the same game.

This scenario begins with two events: the destruction of a powerful Earthbound and the incarnation of one of the greater demons of the Abyss. The exact settings and circumstances of these events are left to you. The characters should be the foremost participants in events, but should realize the full ramifications of their actions only after the fact.

VICTORY

"Better to Rule on Earth" begins with an epic confrontation: a great victory over one of the Earthbound. The monstrous demon's lair is located and attacked, and its reliquary is destroyed, hurtling the spirit back into the waiting clutches of the Abyss. The characters are the key figures in this struggle, whether organizing the forces of their court to root out the menace or single-handedly hunting the monster and dispatching it. The victory is significant for more than merely personal reasons. The characters gain fame and prestige among their kind, and the attack provides them with a treasure trove of information on the monster's peers. This success makes the characters prominent figures in future battles with the Dread Kings, setting them up to fill prominent roles in unfolding events.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This scenario assumes that the Earthbound are far too caught up in personal megalomania to work together in their own defense. Any alliances among them are too little, too late. The reason information on other Earthbound is found in the lair is simple: This being took pains to keep track of its enemies. The most powerful Earthbound are Belial, Abaddon, Dagon, Asmodeus and Azrael. The five archdukes should not make an appearance at this stage, but their activities

can be foreshadowed. Amid the characters' discoveries can be hints to the archdukes' locations and plans.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

The Earthbound are among the primary antagonists of **Demon**, and it's quite possible that one of the spirits is already prominent in your chronicle. If the Dread Kings do not currently figure into your game, the characters could be pitted against such a being at the behest of their court. Alternately, a newly risen Earthbound could make its presence known in the characters' home city, aggressively seeking infernal slaves to bolster its fledgling cult.

When designing the spirit, consider that its powers and cult resources should ensure a worthy foe, but one that can still be beaten. For examples of Earthbound adversaries and their mortal followers, see **Demon**, Chapter Six.

FALLOUT

Following the characters' victory over the Earthbound, they are asked to assist other beleaguered courts against their tormentors. The appeals likely come by way of faction or house connections. Indeed, if the characters already belong to a court, others may attempt to woo them away, whether for short periods or permanently. In all this communication and intrigue lie the seeds of a coordinated effort among various (or all) courts. Offers of power, prestige and material rewards may be enough to tempt even the most reluctant character to accept the role of "Earthbound hunter."

INCARNATION

Following in the wake of the characters' victory and prestige comes an even more significant event: the successful incarnation of a greater demon, an overlord or baron on Earth. She is the highest ranking demon yet to escape the Abyss, either summoned by loyal fallen retainers or having forced her way through the widening cracks of Hell's gate. After her arrival, the demon sizes up the world and invites the most renowned fallen — including the characters — to assemble under her banner.

This being, possibly with the characters' guidance or acting as their patron, considers it her duty to unite the fallen against the Earthbound. By allying the courts and integrating the existing structures of demon organization, she claims the Earthbound can be eradicated and the fallen can gain real temporal influence. They fallen could then be secure to make their presence openly known to humanity. They could arbitrate disputes between nations. They could ensure the equitable distribution of worldly resources. They could — and even the most tormented fallen prick up their ears at this — re-ignite the faith of the human race.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

It isn't absolutely necessary to have the characters directly involved in the manifestation of the greater demon. Their participation is a dramatic and straightforward way of cementing the relationship between them and the powerful newcomer, however. There are a number of different ways to accomplish all this. The demon can be the former liege of one of the characters, and fellow retainers contact the character for help in the mistress' summoning. The characters' court could demand (or needs) their involvement in a summoning ritual. Or the characters can investigate a series of strange occurrences — sacrifices, missing persons — that lead them to a cult in the process of returning the great demon back to Earth.

The difficulties and dangers of summoning greater demons are covered in the **Demon Storytellers Companion**. The newly freed demon may have to change bodies every year or so, or a host may mutate strangely over time, but for the sake of the chronicle she should have a human body and not a reliquary.

TROUBLESHOOTING

If the characters believe the summoning is a bad idea, they can attempt to oppose the manifestation. It's necessary for this scenario that they fail, however. The important thing is that they are involved and witness events. If there are no other promising avenues, the characters' previous assault on the Earthbound could coincide with an attempt by that Dread King to summon and enslave its former overlord. This places the characters in the unenviable position of rescuing the overlord from her fate. This wrinkle would intensify the drama of the assault on the Earthbound, making it much more important than mere victory or defeat for the characters. Perhaps the characters even enlist the overlord's help in destroying their mutual enemy.

The greater demon should be designed to encourage character interaction with other fallen. If they are already established as agents who travel between courts, they automatically become important to her agenda of uniting the world's demons. The mistress may also encourage the characters to assume heroic positions among the fallen to rally others to their (and her) side. The demon lord seeks to allay characters' apprehensions; she is open to their suggestions, and even appreciates their courage and honesty if they were opposed to her summoning. Indeed, they may be the only fallen she feels she can trust.

During this period, the characters make crucial decisions about the roles they will play in events to come. The advantages of uniting the courts should be clear, along with the power and standing that the fallen can obtain from it. The characters should have

roles as diplomats, warriors or investigators (or, if nothing else, deep-cover agents in this dangerous new movement). The characters should certainly travel well beyond their normal range, to foreign courts and places where the Earthbound have become entrenched, and in circles they never imagined before.

FALLOUT

The impact of the greater demon on the fallen political scene is immense. Members of her house are jubilant, and some abandon their current courts or factions to serve her directly. If she does not immediately espouse a faction, many seek to supplicate her, although the existing factional hierarchies may have serious reservations about dealing with so powerful an individual. Of course, now that such a tremendous incarnation has been proved possible, fallen who hoped to summon their own house stalwarts and factional leaders redouble their efforts, leading to the escape of increasingly powerful demons from the Abyss.

CRUSADE

As the number of greater demons gradually increases across the world, the Earthbound recognize the return of their former brethren and step up their campaign to enslave the fallen. Groups of Earthbound thralls attack demons, sacrificing themselves by the

scores to wear down their quarry. Many of these battles are fought before human witnesses (Earthbound thralls understand how human disbelief inhibits the use of fallen lore), feeding the flames of human hysteria ignited by the Devil's Night earthquake in Los Angeles.

As these events unfold, the characters' patron and liege decides to take the initiative. Before the Earthbound can capture too many of the fallen (and before someone more powerful than she claws free of the Abyss), she launches an aggressive campaign to unite the courts against the Dread Kings. As her most valued retainers, the characters are set to be pivotal forces in this global movement.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Nearly all the fallen agree that destroying the Earthbound and revealing themselves to humanity is a good thing. But what exactly is angels' purpose here on Earth? Are the fallen the proper servants or masters of humanity, or has their fusion with mortal identities opened some new possibility? In any case, to what extent should the fallen influence and organize human society? Should they present themselves as angels when the time for revelation comes? How did they all manage to escape from Hell in the first place? These are issues that the fallen as a whole, and the characters in particular, may explore. Debates when the charac-



ters visit other courts, discussions between allies, and above all conversations among the characters should be encouraged.

This episode of the scenario actually covers a series of stories that can range from missions of diplomacy to conquest to assassination. By capitalizing on their reputations as champions, the characters can gain access to the highest levels of the world's infernal courts, and can take an active hand in the unified regime that their overlord seeks to create. Tailor these connected stories to your chronicle and to the style of play your troupe prefers. The events of this chapter can occur over a couple of months or several years of your chronicle, depending on how much time you feel is needed to bring the courts together and to give the characters an opportunity to develop their capabilities (and to tie up loose ends story-wise).

TROUBLESHOOTING

The characters should be given as much freedom of action as possible, to coincide with the other events that set up this scenario. Let them raise and resolve their own dilemmas. What's important is that they become aware of the scale on which events occur, and of the questions that are raised as a result.

REVELATION

The apparition of Lucifer that appeared over Los Angeles on Devil's Night was the first attempt by one of the fallen to awaken mankind to the peril in its midst. As the battle between the fallen and the Earthbound grows in intensity and involves increasing numbers of human witnesses, mankind is forced to accept the existence of the divine.

The key event of this stage is a climactic battle fought in full view of the population of a sizeable human city. It could be a struggle between fallen and Earthbound, or between individual factions of demons jockeying for position amid worldwide unification. Though not as powerful as Lucifer's revelation, this divine event unfolds not in a single moment but over the course of an hour or more. Human witnesses have no choice but to accept what they see as nothing less than a battle between divine creatures, and this revelation sends shockwaves across the globe.

Both the fallen and Earthbound hasten to capitalize on what has begun. Further revelations and some disasters occur. By increments, the existence of the fallen is widely acknowledged. Most of the courts find it necessary to approach and work with human governments to ensure that their efforts against the Earthbound are effective, as large numbers of trained troops are needed to scour the countryside for hidden cults. The paradigm shifts and for the first time since their escape, it becomes

possible for the fallen to feel the faith of the multitudes. Some fearing, some adoring, but all believing.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

Given the characters' tasks of unifying the world's infernal courts and battling the servants of the Earthbound, it should be easy to involve them in a revelatory event. The attempted conquest of a city's court turns to open warfare as the court's tyrant vows to fight to the last demon. Or the Earthbound ambush the characters in an attempt to sabotage their diplomatic efforts.

BEHIND THE SCENES

When glowing, winged beings battle before a city of onlookers, and prominent people are revealed to belong to some cult, does human life continue on its merry way? More than any other factor, mankind's response shifts the scale of this scenario to the truly epic.

Human reaction to angelic manifestations and mind-numbing supernatural revelations should be as realistic as possible, and appropriate to the surroundings. Most nations have organizations such as the United States' FEMA, which have procedures to deal with natural disasters and civil unrest. Having the Vatican unleash a secret force of SAS-trained priests with Faith 5 is all well and good, but it should be balanced in-game with national leaders making televised statements, the Dow Jones dropping dramatically, and widespread looting — the things that *would* happen. Religious bodies do take action, but such efforts are also likely to come in the form of televised statements, mass prayer/meditation, and the organization of aid to those injured and made homeless by events. Mortal reaction spreads from there to wildfire discussion and to fear of and hope for divine powers. No matter what, though, the existence of angels is undeniable.

Perhaps the first tangible sign of a general increase in Faith is that further incarnations of powerful demons succeed. More lords and masters from the Abyss emerge on Earth. The characters need not be involved directly, but they certainly hear about it.

FALLOUT

People tend to go to extremes in difficult and frightening times. Naturally, different religions and cultures have different opinions about what's happening, and some struggle over who's right, whether with debate or violence. Human groups or authorities may react aggressively toward the emergence of supernatural beings, perhaps with less discrimination and compassion than the fallen. As the truth becomes known — that demons masquerade as human beings and sometimes share their power with people — paranoia and persecution may run rampant. These are difficult times for fallen who maintain a human identity. They're

HUMANITY STRIKES BACK

The following human “factions” are useful frameworks by which to organize humanity’s response to open conflict among the fallen and Earthbound.

Cults of Faith. A large proportion of people are ready to believe, at least once the fire and brimstone starts falling like rain. They race to the shelter of established religions, defining the divine in terms of what they already believe — or retreating if they don’t find the answers they so desperately seek. Many of these people form large congregations attached to local courts. Characters could easily draw such a following, whether they try to or not. These groups may not have any particular skills and require attention at times, but the objects of their worship can reap Faith from them whenever they choose, without the usual preliminaries. Such groups of devotees are frequently left to themselves, just like a single thrall with an inattentive master. But human cults tend to develop a life of their own. For example, it could prove awkward if advocates of one fallen massacre the followers of another in a burst of misguided enthusiasm.

Kingmakers. These people believe they can make use of the newly prominent supernatural. They may be mages who are already familiar with the possibilities, or perfectly ordinary people in politics or big business who make bargains even under the worst of conditions. Those who don’t have the potential to be thralls may still be extremely useful to the fallen or to courts, providing services or resources in return for favors.

The Faithful. Mortals who cling to their long-held religious convictions (and who do not define fallen angels by them) are a force to be reckoned with. These people do not put faith in demons, but defy or abhor them. They may control sanctified areas where neither fallen or Earthbound can tread. They may be well organized and encompass whole communities. They (probably unwittingly) have the power to summon, bind and dispel the beings that have suddenly emerged. These people may publicly protest fallen activities and sway potential believers away. They could be manipulated as weapons by the Earthbound to pit against demons, their allies and resources. No matter what, these people prove a thorn in the side of the fallen, refuting or defying whatever demons seek to accomplish in the world.



confronted with a choice: reveal themselves as more of the angels, or hide from condemnation and hope that loved ones will also be overlooked. Times are tough for thralls as well. They have allegiances to the fallen. If those ties are revealed (or not protected), these people may be victim to persecution, too.

Paranoia and violence is one human reaction to the revelation of the divine. Other people may accept the fallen with open arms. Most likely, a gamut of reactions is run. Fallen characters, their loved ones and their thralls may be welcomed and condemned, all in one city. The characters' campaign against the Earthbound may still continue, but now with the support (or interference) of humans.

SURPRISE ATTACK

Despite the general galvanizing of humanity — or perhaps because of it — the characters' efforts and those of their liege are ultimately successful. The patron and her allies approach remaining fallen holdouts and call for a truce to hold a grand council of all the Earth's courts. The characters are at the forefront, possibly forging the diplomatic ties that make the meeting possible. It's a difficult, delicate process, but the vast changes that have swept the globe since the return of the characters' liege offer a degree of leverage over remaining demons that ultimately persuades them to toe the line.

Once the final pieces are in place, all that remains is to settle upon a neutral meeting place. In a display of her increasing power, the characters' mistress raises an island from the Polynesian chain in the Pacific Ocean and creates a bastion after the citadels of old. The event is covered worldwide by human media sources as the high and mighty of the fallen meet in all their tattered finery. The event touches off another wave of awe and hysteria among mortals. More and more men and women believe that the end is nigh. Yet, even their worst fears pale before the reality that unfolds on live television. The bastion's defenses are compromised by an agent among the fallen ranks, and the Earthbound launch a massive assault.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The focus of the meeting is all the newly incarnated greater demons. It's their existence and desire to speak together that finally tips the balance. No fallen on Earth can resist attending or bearing witness to this assembly. The lords want to discuss freeing the remainder of those in Hell. There still seems to be an upper limit on the ranks that can be summoned. Some theorize that the ambient faith of the world, although increasing, is still too low to permit the remaining dukes to manifest. Or maybe something else prevents their release.

The characters may have already noticed that the more tenuous a demon's hold on a human body, the less humane she is in attitudes and actions. Even their own patron's standards may seem to slip, especially when she thinks she is unobserved. No matter how diplomatic or impressive these demons may be in public, their unguarded behavior is alienating at best. At worst, it tends toward monstrous.

The incarnated greater demons should not be presented as a monolithic power bloc. There are disagreements among them. Indeed, the characters themselves may be powerful by now, and have even more experience with being fallen than do their angelic overlords. But greater demons have sufficient power that they cannot be ignored in council, nor when the Earthbound attack. Their behavior serves as a warning to what the highest ranks of the host will be like if they're ever freed.

The attack on the council meeting involves a combination of forces — say, combat-enhanced thralls, infernal slaves, technological chicanery and a tidal wave — all of which are arranged by the Earthbound archdukes. The attack also coincides with strikes against key resources possessed by the most prominent courts. Characters are therefore endangered whether they attend the meeting or are abroad. The archdukes intend to throw the new alliance into confusion and demonstrate to the world that the fallen are not indestructible. They proclaim themselves the real powers that be, ancient gods, and promise destruction to all who stand against them. Meanwhile, those who return to the fold will know paradise.

FALLOUT

The archdukes have vast, secret reserves of worshippers, deals made with the dictators of small countries, and deep-cover agents by the score. They fight for their survival. The real battle is joined. It begins at the island, but is waged worldwide and may proceed for some time.

Running a global war may seem intimidating, but fallen tactics may be distilled to these basics:

- Increasing their influence over humanity, creating safe zones that may be relied upon for Faith.
- Uncovering and neutralizing traitors and betrayers within safe zones and courts.
- Locating Earthbound reliquaries and destroying them by any means necessary.

There is also the vital concern of human nuclear weapons and the demonic capacity to trigger plagues, earthquakes and tidal waves. Is hampering the opposition by wiping out worshippers justifiable? The Earthbound don't suffer these qualms, and this may be where the inhumanity of greater fallen demons becomes an immediate concern for characters.

The characters can become involved in this war in whatever capacity best suits them and your chronicle. There may be an immediate struggle for control of the courts and command of the war. As the fight continues, there should be plenty of opportunities for characters to strut and preen, spread their wings and to throw tall buildings around if they like. Let the characters flex their muscles if it suits their identities. Tempt them with the prospect of being counted among the rulers of the world. But never let the characters forget the consequences of

their actions in terms of human death, hardship and refugees. Despite the harm done to them, many people swear allegiance, make blood sacrifices and perform any acts demanded of them. They forfeit their own will and identity, an obvious contrast to what defined humanity before, and an indicator of how the divine violates mankind. Alternatively, people may be willing to do anything for their masters in return for such basics as food and shelter—further proof of the harm that the fallen do to the world.

RISEING STAR

Where is Lucifer in the midst of all of this?

The Morningstar's intentions depend on what's happened up till now. Has power become concentrated in demon lords' monstrous hands, the human masses they oversee resembling the holdings of the remaining Earthbound? Or have the fallen formed a coalition of equals and they conduct the war with due concern for humanity? Are greater demons restrained by lack of support or even by being humanized through the efforts of the characters and their allies? For the first time in millennia, Lucifer may feel a sense of hope that at least some of his former followers can be redeemed. If the characters encounter him, he may ask that they do not reveal his existence, fearing that his influence would doom any positive new dynamics.

If things look grim, however, Lucifer is prepared to take action. He may secretly inspire whichever human faction offers the most resistance to all demons—most likely the Faithful (see the "Humanity Strikes Back" sidebar). But fallen—ones he is truly convinced have turned their backs on their demonic natures and have worked against the horror—are needed as well. The characters may have the opportunity to become Lucifer's agents.

It could be interesting for Lucifer to be revealed as someone the characters already know, or at least have seen at a distance on several occasions. In any case, great care should be taken with his characterization. It is here that the characters face the paradox of needing to draw on the faith of people in order to free them, but still allowing humanity faith in itself in order to be truly free.

Lucifer's primary goal is to deal with his one-time lieutenants, the newly arrived lords and the archdukes among the Earthbound. Their presence is his doing and he seeks to resolve it. He may wish to give them one last chance to repent. He may be willing to use himself as bait to lure them to destruction at the hands of his allies, or to seal them back in the Abyss (see "The Gates of Hell").

THE GATES OF HELL

Assault by the Earthbound sets the stage for the final act of Armageddon. The Dread Kings unleash every force at their disposal to vanquish the leaders of the united courts. Thunderous waves strike the tiny island. Fire and brimstone plunge from the sky and the earth heaves with the spirits' fury. Human servants (some using fearsome mortal weapons such as chemical, biological or nuclear weapons) are hurled into the fray, heedless of the casualties or the widespread havoc they cause. Members of the council, though initially taken by surprise, react mercilessly, hurling thunderbolts of their own. The betrayal of the council results in widespread casualties among the dignitaries, but even worse their intended unity is shattered by the knowledge that there is a traitor among them. Just when the unity of the courts is needed most, fear and mistrust threaten to undermine it in the final hour.

The surprise attack itself is only the opening salvo of this apocalyptic struggle. More assaults are staged worldwide, or Earthbound attackers are defeated or driven off and surviving fallen return to their courts and lash out at their perceived enemies—fallen and Earthbound alike. Human governments are subordinated and their militaries used to root out enemy sympathizers (real or imagined). Armies strike suspected Earthbound lairs with everything in their arsenals. Millions die in the crossfire, and their loss unleashes an enormous amount of Faith that only serves to drive the combatants' rituals to greater heights of destruction.

The Earthbound have struck a mortal blow against their enemies in more ways than one. Though they suffer at the hands of the fallen, the war as a whole works in their favor. The council, riven with paranoia and mistrust, tears itself apart even as it fights the Earthbound. All the Dread Kings have to do is ride out the storm (and perhaps betray another rival or two to the enemy), and then rise up to enslave the survivors. Humanity, its spirit broken in the maelstrom, will be bent to Earthbound will. A Hell on Earth the likes of which no mortal or demon can imagine is about to unfold unless something is done to stop it.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This is it: the end of the world. Whole nations are consumed by fire as Earthbound and fallen vie for total mastery. The characters are caught in this vortex, but as retainers of ostensibly the most powerful fallen on Earth they are in a unique position to shape the future.

A number of momentous choices lay before the characters. Do they attempt to overcome the divisions between council survivors and lead them in a doomed battle against the Dread Kings? Or do they use what power they can assemble to break the gates of the Abyss once and for all, freeing the remainder of the host?

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

As the Earthbound and the fallen thrash about with everything they have in a last bid for dominance, the characters can be key participants. They're entrusted with the authority and power of their liege, and empowered to defeat the enemy by any means necessary. The characters have access to everything at their lord's disposal — more power in supernatural and mortal terms than any other overlords and Earthbound. They have to use that power in the best way possible. Inaction is not an option. It's just a delaying tactic for the end, when enemies can overcome even the characters.

FALLOUT

As stated previously, there are some broad solutions to the Earthbound menace. The council is in tatters and the world is in flames. Defeat is certain unless new allies can be forged to defeat the Dread Kings. With the resurgence in human Faith, a group of fallen in the council's service believes it can perform a ritual to break down the final barriers of the Abyss and free the remainder of the host. With their numbers thus bolstered, victory for the fallen would be ensured, but the Earth would fall under the rule of demonic powers potentially just as monstrous as the Dread Kings themselves. Humanity would survive, but at what cost?

Another option is even more grim. The characters can attempt to unify council survivors and make a last stand against the Earthbound. The resulting battle would be utterly destructive. Victory for the fallen would mean world devastation as every remaining weapon and relic would be brought to bear. The fallen might survive, but humanity might not. The characters must decide whether it's better to live under the yoke of their Abyssal overlords or to risk existence itself in a near-hopeless battle. Is it better for humanity to live as slaves or die as free beings?

If the characters elect to free the Abyssal dukes, they are crucial participants in the great ritual, whether

as contributors, guardians or coordinators. Successful completion of the ritual is not the end of the struggle. Battles are still fought as the reinvigorated fallen host seeks out and destroys the Earthbound across the globe. Eventual victory is assured, however.

If the characters decide to fight the Earthbound without the aid of the Abyssal lords, they must unite surviving council members and lead them in the final struggle. With the resources of their liege at their disposal, the characters should have a chance to defeat the remaining Earthbound, though the cost is truly terrible. By the time the last of the Dread Kings fall, the Earth lies in ruins. Entire continents are burned to cinders and humanity is reduced to a few thousand scattered souls. It's the end of the world as the fallen and mankind know it, but those who survive are free to decide what the future will bring.

THE NEW WORLD

Whether the Abyssal dukes manifest or the Earthbound are destroyed at last, the Earthly paradigm is malleable in fallen hands. There is sufficient ambient Faith for demons to no longer require physical anchors. The Earth is a burning ruin and humanity is reduced to virtual extinction, but where there are angels, even fallen ones, there is hope for the future.

Can Earth be remade into Eden once more? It depends on the characters. Can human beings exist with some dignity, or does survival consist of encampments where wretched masses shelter from the collapse of their one-time reality? Do the characters cast off their human bodies and take to the skies with their brethren? Or do they choose to remain bound to humanity and become some new kind of being that can at last fulfil the rebels' dream of interacting with mankind and guiding people toward their full potential? The path ahead may be far from clear. The fallen may have lost the guidance of Lucifer forever. God and His purpose may still be a mystery, but there are wondrous millennia ahead.

PARADISE WON

The final end scenario of this chapter focuses on the theme of personal redemption, and by extension the redemption of the fallen as a whole. Rather than an apocalyptic struggle against the Earthbound or the greater demons of the Pit, "Paradise Won" depicts a climactic struggle between the fallen and an army of human believers led by none other than Lucifer himself. After centuries of battling the Dread Kings (for more details see Chapter One of *The Earthbound*), the former Prince of the Fallen regards recently freed demons as no different from his ancient enemies. The

only way to save humanity from destruction (or eternal enslavement) is to restore its waning faith and wield it as a weapon against demons worldwide. Lucifer means to raise a modern crusade that will drive Earthbound and fallen alike back into the Abyss, and seal the prison shut forever, even if it means destroying the world in the process. It is a last-ditch effort to save humanity from the fruits of his rebellion, and an attempt at redemption on the part of the First Angel. Whether Lucifer and his mortal army can be stopped — or if the Morningstar can be convinced that at least some of the fallen can be saved — lies in the hands of the characters themselves.

SEEDS OF ARMAGEDDON

Revitalizing humanity's lost faith after hundreds of years of steady decline is not something that can happen overnight. This scenario postulates that Lucifer begins his campaign the moment the first fallen return to Earth. The Morningstar's plan is comprised of two grand phases. The first is a global campaign of angelic revelations and miracles designed to shock humanity from its collective cynicism, and to awaken it to the peril in its midst. The second phase involves creating militant religious groups that will be the core of his human crusade. The key to the second phase is the involvement of the imbued — men and women who are aware of the existence of demons and who possess miraculous powers capable of combating such beings.

In the past, the imbued have suffered from lack of organization and direction. Their mysterious benefactors have been content to alert and empower mortals, but to otherwise leave them to their own devices. As phase two begins, Lucifer presents himself as the power behind the imbued, aptly playing the role of an otherworldly Herald to unite as many as possible under his banner. The imbued act as Lucifer's shock troops, their sacrifices being a shining example for the multitudes of the faithful to follow. For basic information on the imbued and their capabilities, refer to Chapter Five of the **Demon Storytellers Companion**. For more details (including a comprehensive set of powers and a breakdown of the hunter types) feel free to use the expanded rules provided in **Hunter: The Reckoning**. If you haven't included the imbued in your **Demon** chronicle before, you can introduce them now as mortals empowered by Lucifer himself, or you can simply disregard them altogether and have the Morningstar rely entirely on faithful mortals.

Lucifer's effort gets underway with his fiery appearance at the height of the Devil's Night riots in Los Angeles (for a detailed timeline of the riots and Lucifer's actions, see Chapter One of **City of Angels**). This revelation sends shockwaves throughout the religious

community as priests and theologians struggle to understand the significance of the glowing figure replayed endlessly in news footage. In the weeks and months that follow, more stories surface of strange and wondrous sightings — even miracles — taking place all over the world. The vast majority occur in the presence of only a small number of witnesses, and few if any are caught on camera as was the dramatic event in Los Angeles.

The intent of these small but more numerous encounters is to create the impression that acts of divine revelation can happen anywhere, at any time, and that these are experiences are meant for only a select few. The idea is to galvanize religious individuals to revisit their beliefs and stoke the fires of faith in hopes of being the next to experience divine intervention. Lucifer tailors his revelations for areas of increased Faith, thus perpetuating the cycle of belief.

It's important that the characters hear about a number of these spectacles over the course of your chronicle in order to properly set the stage for this scenario. You can't credibly have the collective Faith of mankind make a dramatic leap overnight and set the masses against the fallen. The characters should learn of events after the fact, as news reports, hearsay or whispered rumors among faithful mortals. The characters (or any other demons) are not present to witness any of these revelations first hand. Lucifer is very careful to avoid revealing himself to the fallen or their thralls to avoid playing his hand. That said, if the characters explore the supposed miracles you can use the opportunity to tell small, investigative stories that reveal few hard facts but that point to an ominous momentum building across the world.

The power and scope of Lucifer's revelations increase in intensity to match mankind's growing belief. The following are some suggested spectacles that you can share over time to build a sense of tension.

• **Instances of Divine Providence and/or Divine Justice (early phase).** In the early part of phase one, dozens of stories circulate of fortuitous events or instances of divine justice that suggest the work of supernatural forces. Children lost in the wilderness wander right up to searchers' base camp. A family of four living on the street finds a discarded lottery ticket that pays enough money to get them out of debt. A corrupt politician brags about his recent dirty deals to an attractive young intern — who turns out to be the sister of a FBI agent.

• **Reports of Revelatory Dreams (early phase).** Another form of revelation involves vivid dreams warning of a coming apocalypse. In each case the dreamer is addressed by a towering, angelic figure who declares that the human race will be forced to choose between survival and damnation. The rash of dreams

gains broad attention when people worldwide come forward on radio shows, internet chat rooms and in online journals to describe the same dream (or series of dreams) in minute detail.

- **Reports of Bizarre Meteorological Phenomena (early phase).** The press reports eyewitness descriptions of rivers turning to blood, of a dark shadow passing before the sun, and of villages pelted with a rain of hot sulfur (brimstone). Each instance lasts only a few moments and defies any attempt at scientific explanation.

- **Signs of Stigmata (mid-phase).** Devout religious figures from bishops to rabbis to mullahs manifest signs of stigmata — bleeding from the hands, forehead and eyes. Individuals with high Faith potential from all beliefs and walks of life are similarly affected. The fact that the phenomena occur across religions touches off a storm of debate and speculation in churches, mosques and temples.

- **Reports of Angelic Visitation (mid-phase).** Ordinary people, from the devout to professed atheists, report encounters with a fiery, angelic figure reminiscent of the being seen during the Devil's Night riots. The angel warns that the end of the world is at hand. But rather than make a call to repent, the angel commands people to "prepare for the coming battle."

- **Sanctification of Holy Sites (mid-phase).** Scores of holy sites, from churches to ordinary roadside shrines, suddenly become palpably sanctified — holy ground in more than just name. Visitors immediately sense transcendent strength and an almost electrical tingle of power. Most sites gain a Faith potential of 1 for determining damage to a demon.

- **Empowerment of Mortals (late phase).** Mortals in desperate circumstances who pray to their respective deities find themselves momentarily gifted with superhuman ability. A woman cradling her baby leaps 10 stories from her burning apartment and lands on her feet without so much as a scratch. A man trapped under a two-ton boulder is able to push it aside and walk to the nearest highway. A researcher working on a cure for AIDS is struck with sudden clarity that allows him to make a crucial breakthrough.

- **Divine Acts of Healing and Resurrection (late phase).** Mortals who pray for healing or to save the life of a loved one are visited by a luminous figure who fulfills their wishes. A child dying of a brain tumor is healed with a single touch. A man bleeding to death from a mugging is healed in his fiancée's arms. In rare cases, individuals who have died and who are just beyond reach of medical resuscitation are brought back to life.

- **Revelation of the Existence of Demons (late phase).** In the final weeks of phase one, Lucifer uses his power to reveal the existence of demons to mortals

with sufficiently high Faith. Lucifer uses a specially designed ritual to affect the sight of mortals who have a Faith potential of 3 or higher. When a subject encounters one of the fallen, he or she sees the demon's revelatory form rather than the demon's human appearance. When an affected mortal encounters a thrall, he or she sees the mortal's demonic master superimposed over the thrall's features. If the demon in question is an Earthbound, the image is a terrifying one, indeed. If your chronicle includes other supernatural creatures such as vampires or werewolves, the ritual reveals their existence as well. The purpose of this stage is to reinforce Lucifer's previous warnings of a coming apocalypse, and to generate a climate of fear and need among the faithful.

The amount of time it takes Lucifer to raise enough Faith in enough people to move on to phase two depends entirely on the timing of your chronicle. If your game is well established and you're ready to proceed with cataclysm, skip ahead to the late-phase revelations. Characters' research can uncover documented evidence of previous early- and mid-phase revelations that had simply been too scattered or irregular to have been picked up by the mass media. If you don't plan to end your chronicle for some time, introduce the occasional early-phase event to lay the groundwork for what's to come. When the time is right, up the ante to mid-phase events with a corresponding increase in frequency. Late-phase spectacles should occur in rapid succession over a period of months or even weeks prior to phase two.

HOMETOWN MIRACLES

The first milestone of this apocalyptic scenario takes place near the end of phase one. As divine events increase in number and intensity, a global movement of the faithful spreads the good word. The group calls itself the Order of the Herald. Its ranks include men and women from all races, religions and walks of life. Chapter houses spring up in cities and towns, including the characters'. The local house opens overnight. Its founders arrive in town, move into a building purchased in advance, and begin their work the next morning, spreading Lucifer's warnings to the masses, running a soup kitchen and visiting local hospitals. Before long, their activities include genuine acts of faith — healing the injured, curing mental illness and empowering the weak and crippled. Before long the chapter house reaps a harvest of eager converts and gains the attention of every demon in the city, for good or ill.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The chapter houses are intended to spread Lucifer's message and build an infrastructure for the coming crusade. Each is run by one to four individuals with

Faith potentials of 3 to 4. They have been enthralled by Lucifer and gifted with the capacity to heal. These thralls also have exceptional Physical, Mental and Social Traits, as Lucifer uses their full Faith potential to reshape their bodies and souls, while taking none for himself. These thralls are in turn supported by anywhere from 10 to 20 normal order members, individuals with Faith potentials from 1 to 3 but with no special capabilities. Subordinate members' jobs are to spread the word, perform good works for the community and induct as many new members as possible.

How local demons react to the chapter house is the central conflict here. Many view the order as a potential goldmine of mortals ripe for thralldom. Others see the house as a potential threat, fearful of the power behind the order. Still other demons consider the institution to have the potential to do a lot of good in a dark and despairing world, and seek to form some kind of alliance.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

There are a number of ways to tell a story based on these events, depending on the characters' perspectives. They can investigate the force behind the chapter house. The building is holy ground (Faith potential 1). Unless the characters have very low Torment they can't simply sneak in and rifle the offices for clues. They have to dig up information on order members and interview recent converts to understand how the organization operates.

If the characters view the house as a potential source for high-powered thralls, they face the challenge of tempting and converting fairly strong-willed, devout individuals — and fending off other demons from doing the same. This kind of story could bring the characters into conflict with potential rivals in the local court, possibly even the local tyrant himself.

If the characters consider the chapter house a threat to be eliminated, they have a challenge ahead of them. At the first sign of demonic challenge, house leaders can increase the Faith potential of their site from 1 to 3, making a direct confrontation disadvantageous for the fallen. Order appeals to the "angel" for aid result in a series of visions directed at any imbued in the area, summoning them to help defend the site. (If you don't want to use the imbued, Lucifer dispatches a large group of high-powered thralls to reinforce the chapter house.) The result is a proxy war of sorts, as the characters may attempt to eliminate the house through thralls or mortal allies.

Ideally, the characters view the chapter house as a force for good in the community (Reconcilers and Luciferans may be particularly partial to it), and decide that it's worth protecting from the depredations of

monstrous powers. The result could be a series of stories as the characters are pitted against a variety of threats, from local demons to religious extremists to politicians threatened by the order's growing influence. Forging a direct alliance with the chapter house is extremely difficult; Lucifer's thralls have been warned to avoid temptation from "demons bearing the guise of angels." It may be possible to forge ties (and Faustian pacts) with new converts, though such allies need to keep their relationships with the characters a closely guarded secret. Members of the order found to have ties with "demons" face instant expulsion. Still, the characters could view any relationship with the order as a possible route to redemption.

FALLOUT

The results of this episode depend on the characters' actions. If they choose to investigate the order, they learn a number of important facts. Chapter houses appear all over the world, crossing national, cultural and religious boundaries. The order doesn't claim an official birthplace or founding date. Rather, it seems to have sprung up spontaneously in at least a dozen scattered locations. Senior members of each house claim to have been visited by an angel warning to prepare for a coming apocalypse. Finally — and perhaps most importantly — each senior member is a powerful thrall (which can be determined with a successful Supernatural Awareness roll if a fallen is present when a thrall uses one of his gifts).

Considering Lucifer's appearance at Los Angeles, it's reasonable to assume that the Morningstar is the power behind the order. That insight could affect the characters' views on the organization for better or worse. Insightful or patient characters may realize that by studying the thralls over a period of time they might learn a portion of the Morningstar's True Name, an asset few would be willing to overlook. No order members know how to find or contact their "angel." In fact, few have seen the celestial figure more than once.

If the characters attempt to use the local chapter house as their own private preserve of thralls (and manage to keep other poaching demons at bay), they enjoy initial success if they're capable of passing themselves off as other angels. It's easy to gain willing servants from the crowd of would-be converts, though it's difficult to persuade them to leave the society. Clever characters are all too willing to leave thralls in place, gaining eyes and ears (and hands) within the chapter house itself.

If the characters attempt to eliminate the chapter house and are successful, the survivors (if any) flee town. They return several months later, however, accompanied by a large, well-equipped group of imbued. Rather

than set up in a single locale, they operate more surreptitiously, pursuing activities within the community and holding impromptu gatherings to spread their message in city parks and community centers. At the same time they actively investigate the identities of possible fallen and their thralls, withholding the information until they receive further instruction from their “angel.”

If an attempt to eliminate the chapter house is only partially successful (or fails), the survivors develop a siege mentality, hunkering down and venturing out only to get supplies or make occasional visits to area hospitals.

If the characters choose to protect the chapter house from threats, they don't reap any noticeable benefits beyond the satisfaction of taking a stand to make their home a better place. Order members avoid any relationships with the characters, and refuse any direct offers of help. At best, the characters become the chapter's guardians, watching from afar.

The one benefit to all of these approaches is that the characters emerge with valuable experience with and information on the order. Gains that prove important in the future.

DAMAGE CONTROL

There is little that can actually go wrong at this stage; it's mostly about the relationships that characters

establish with the order. The only possible problem is if the characters ignore the chapter house altogether. There are a number of ways to focus their attention. If they're members of the local court they could be called upon by ministers or the tyrant to look into the problem. Alternatively, the order could make itself difficult to ignore by gaining influence in one or more areas important to the characters — gaining converts in political or corporate offices or possibly even converting one or more of the characters' thralls. A final option is to have characters' rivals take a direct interest in the order, with the clear intention of using the group as a weapon against the characters.

THE EARTHBOUND ATTACK

This scenario occurs several months after the emergence of the chapter houses. The order has grown, spreading to every major city, and its charitable acts have gained it a huge following. Its ranks include celebrities, prominent executives and a handful of young, idealistic politicians, all of whom use their varying levels of influence to spread the group's message that mankind must prepare for the final days.

Since Lucifer's appearance in Los Angeles, the Earthbound have watched the revitalization of mankind's faith with satisfaction, seeing the potential



for a return to the glory days of human worship. The rise of the order, however, is a very different matter. The Dread Kings have learned painful lessons battling the Morningstar, and see the danger posed by Lucifer's strategy. The spirits realize that they must strike before the Morningstar can marshal an army of humans. In the months over which the order spreads, the Earthbound forge temporary alliances and gather their own forces, planning on a pre-emptive strike. It's a stratagem Lucifer counts on.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The Earthbound plan to launch simultaneous attacks on *all* of the order's chapter houses, striking with teams of heavily armed thralls and enslaved demons. There's no attempt at subtlety or finesse — the attackers hit with bullets and firebombs, and hunt down any remaining members left in the area. The move is intended to assert Earthbound power in a direct and traumatic way, crushing Lucifer's effort in a single, bloody stroke and commanding the worship of the terrified masses.

But the Morningstar is prepared for just such an attack. He realizes that the chapter houses are bound to force the Dread Kings to act. He intends to use the battle as the rallying cry for his planned crusade. Perhaps only the fallen, situated between the two forces, are caught unawares.

Lucifer senses the positioning of Earthbound forces around the world and warns the order. Instead of achieving quick, brutal strikes, assault teams face prepared, fanatical defenders equipped with everything from blessed swords to assault rifles. The attacks are repulsed with heavy losses, but the Earthbound know it's now or never and redouble their efforts. They send in reinforcements, even using their own powers to pummel strategic cities with earthquakes, horrific manifestations of chaos (see **Demon: The Earthbound** for details on Earthbound lore and rituals) and unnatural storms.

The characters' hometown is no exception. The earth trembles, thunder splits the sky and the servants of the Earthbound rampage through the streets, slaughtering any member of the order they can find. Both sides are equally matched in determination and ferocity — it's the characters' actions that turn the tide for one group or the other.

The Dread Kings' assault provides the characters with an opportunity to choose between redemption or personal interest. There are three courses of action to follow. The characters can lend support to the Earthbound, attacking order members in hopes of removing any future threat to the fallen. They can side with the order to defeat the Earthbound, preserving the local

chapter house. Or the characters can attempt to play both sides, helping each just enough to ensure that the battle exhausts their strength and leaves them helpless against the city's fallen.

This milestone can be presented as a single story or as a series. Order members fight hard but are careful to avoid casualties among innocent bystanders. The Earthbound, of course, have no such compunctions. Property damage is massive. If the characters seem reluctant to enter the fray they may be persuaded to once they realize that there may be nothing left of their home if the battle rages too long.

FALLOUT

If the characters commit to supporting either side, the fighting runs its course in a matter of days. There are numerous public displays of celestial power. Lucifer's campaign to reinvigorate the faith of humanity inures the public to divine displays. Mortals are immune to the effects of Revelation (see **Demon**, p. 253), and the fallen do not suffer penalties for performing evocations before mortal witnesses.

If the characters support the order, the Earthbound put up a fanatical resistance, but are not able to fend off both opponents. They're slowly but steadily wiped out in a series of hard-fought battles. If the characters are careful to fight by the same standards as the order (avoiding the loss of innocent life at all costs) and/or have aided and protected a chapter house since the previous episode, society leaders grudgingly accept them as allies. If the characters' actions represent a change of heart from the previous episode, the order reacts to them with suspicion but not outright hostility.

If the characters support the Earthbound, the order puts up stiff resistance for a few days, and then crumbles as food and ammunition runs out. Members of the local chapter house flee the city and the Earthbound hunt them through the streets like animals. Those caught are tortured to death and their mutilated bodies are crucified atop telephone poles as an example of what happens to mortals who defy the Dread Kings. A week or so after the battle more Earthbound teams arrive, led by a band of demonic servants who claim the characters' town in the name of their master.

If the characters try to bleed both sides to exhaustion, the battle lasts much longer, as much as a month. There is massive loss of life among civilians, and property damage runs into the hundreds of millions. When the characters (and presumably other fallen in town) attack the weakened forces, the move comes as a total surprise. Both Earthbound and order forces are driven out within 24 hours, leaving the characters in full control of a burning ruin.

Many similar dramas play out across the world as the Earthbound and the order tear at one another. Both sides have access to military hardware thanks to their worshippers. The overall result is inconclusive. The order wins in some cities, the Earthbound win others. Millions of mortals around the world cry out for salvation... and Lucifer smiles grimly.

The time is right for a crusade.

DAMAGE CONTROL

Again, there's little that might go wrong in this milestone. Once the characters chose which side of the battle they join, the die is cast. The only possible stumbling block is if they choose not to act at all — a bewildering choice in the face of open warfare, but possible nonetheless. If the characters do not act they stand to lose all their mortal possessions: their homes, mortal families, contacts, allies and thralls. If you make this possibility clear it should go a long way to persuading them to act.

CRUSADE

During the first major lull in fighting, news services still running in Los Angeles receive word of a glowing figure hovering in the night sky above a plaza near city hall — the same location of the Devil's Night revelation. News crews rush to the scene, and the angel waits in silent majesty as they set up their equipment. Once they're ready, Lucifer begins his rallying cry to the world. At the same time, every thrall in the order hears his voice thundering in their heads, their mouths rallying the faithful to battle.

The Lightbringer delivers a short but impassioned speech infused with all the power and charisma that an angel of the First House can muster. He pronounces that the final battle has begun, and that humanity faces a choice: fight back against the legions of hell or become slaves for all time. The Morningstar urges every able man, woman and child to join the order and participate in a crusade "that will drive the forces of wickedness from the world and seal them up in darkness forever."

With that, the former Prince of the Fallen raises a glowing hand and the earth beneath the plaza heaves. A single tower of black stone rises into the sky, gleaming with celestial power — the beginnings of a new Gehinnom. Lucifer hides among mankind no more, taking his place as the leader of a new army in a war against his former compatriots.

Faced with the horror and destruction wrought by the Earthbound, few people need much in the way of persuasion. Terrified mortals flock to chapter houses. The injured are healed and the able are sent to the front lines.

It's only a few days after Lucifer's call to arms that crusade leaders are put to the test. Belial, the Great Beast, former champion of the infernal host, appears in Los Angeles at the head of a small army of demons, thralls and cultists, howling for the Morningstar's blood. This time Lucifer accepts the Great Beast's challenge, and the whole world watches as the two former friends fight to the death. It's a battle out of the War of Wrath, a titanic struggle that lasts for seven days and seven nights, crushing everything in its path. The struggle reduces the city to rubble save for the Morningstar's spire. Lucifer himself receives seven terrible wounds, but Belial falls in the end.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Lucifer's stratagem has worked. The Earthbound have given him the spectacle he needs to rally humanity and begin his crusade. Even the fight with Belial is part of his campaign — a final showdown anticipated for millennia. In truth, Lucifer is gravely wounded. Belial's hate eats at the Morningstar's flesh like acid, and the seven great wounds never fully heal. But the victory is enough to send a message to both the Great Beast's followers and enemies: The crusade will not be stopped by anyone or anything.

The campaign takes shape, directed from Lucifer's spire and initiating a coordinated movement against the Earthbound. It presents the fallen with a golden opportunity to eliminate some of their deadliest enemies by aiding the order. While much more numerous than the Earthbound, the mortals still have a hard time holding their own against infernal servants, something the characters are well-equipped to handle. This episode is meant to consist of a series of stories (it could be a mini-chronicle) covering the struggle against the Earthbound.

If the characters fought alongside the order before, they can join the chapter in the local effort against the Earthbound. The target could be a long-time adversary that has plagued the characters, or you can create a new antagonist who has assaulted the town.

If the characters sided with the Earthbound previously, those alliances may collapse now. Prior to Lucifer's announcement, the Dread Kings and the characters were undoubtedly successful in overcoming the local order. Alliances mean nothing to the Earthbound thereafter; they have what they want and turn on the characters. The fallen are hunted in their own hometown, trying to avoid capture teams and keeping their mortal loved ones and thralls out of the Dread King's camps. After Lucifer's announcement and a renewed war with humanity, the order launches a campaign to reclaim the city. The characters may now redeem themselves by fighting a guerilla war against the betraying Earthbound occupiers.

If the characters fought both sides in the last episode, both the Earthbound and order perceive the characters as enemies. This milestone focuses on survival as the characters struggle to protect their mortal allies and themselves from slavery and banishment.

The strategy of the bolstered order is ruthless and methodical, drawing on Lucifer's ancient experience in fighting the Earthbound. Groups of imbued identify and destroy enemy thralls by using their powers of detection, and then target the Dread Kings' cults. The cultists are much more difficult to uncover, requiring mundane tactics of investigation, interrogation and execution. The effort calls for an organization in the order that bears a frightening resemblance to the medieval Inquisition. Once the Earthbound lose all their sources of support, the order goes after the spirits and their demonic servants directly. The process takes time (months or even years depending on how long you want to stretch things out), but it's ultimately effective.

Not that the Dread Kings go quietly, of course. The world is wracked by a war more terrible than any in human memory. Every conceivable weapon is used by both sides — chemical and biological agents ravage human populations. Several Earthbound reliquaries are destroyed by nuclear devices. The death toll reaches the billions, and much of the world is laid waste.

DAMAGE CONTROL

At this point the characters must fight or die — the choice is up to them. If they don't act they'll lose everything that matters to them, from mortal friends and allies to their very freedom.

THE HUNTED

The crusade gains momentum with every victory over the Earthbound. More and more mortal survivors throw in their lot with the order as the only way to survive. As the movement grows in scope and intensity, Lucifer oversees a gradual transformation of human civilization, creating a new society that mirrors the meritocracy of the Age of Wrath. The burgeoning new society brings much-needed law and order to the remnants of humanity, but it also has a dark side. Crimes are punished ruthlessly, and paranoia runs deep in areas tainted by hidden Earthbound cultists. Mortals keep tabs on their neighbors, alert for any signs of suspected Earthbound worship. An Inquisition takes shape to "protect the true believers from the sin of demon veneration." Fallen thralls are caught in the Inquisition's net and are dealt with just as mercilessly as Earthbound cultists. While the overall Faith potential of mankind increases dramatically, it's exceedingly challenging for the Earthbound to forge new pacts in a totalitarian world order. Lucifer sets the stage for part two of his campaign.

The hunts begin without warning. Veterans of the Earthbound campaign are recalled from current assignments, are replaced with others recruits, and given a new mission: hunt the fallen and destroy them wherever they're found.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Lucifer has now entered the final stage. With the Earthbound on the verge of total defeat he believes he has the strength to eliminate the fallen as well, organizing hunting parties to arrest and execute thralls and banish demons.

If the characters have supported and protected the order for some time, they get at least a few hours' advance warning before the purges begin. If they were initial opponents of the order or only recently took humanity's side in the war, the change in tactics comes as a complete surprise.

This milestone should cover a series in which the fallen face the dark side of Lucifer's crusade. Though mankind has the upper hand over the Earthbound, humanity lives in a police state similar to Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia, with informers, secret police and summary executions of "enemies of the race." Now the characters and their mortal allies are the hunted, trying to survive a merciless worldwide blood hunt.

The fallen have some advantages here that the Earthbound don't, however. They're much more flexible in the way they gain Faith, and are much more adept at blending in with society. These benefits allow the fallen to gain a number of early victories in the purge, but the sheer weight of the crusade makes total victory impossible. Demons are forced onto the defensive, smuggling themselves and their supporters out of harm's way and resorting to refuges in the wastelands beyond surviving cities. Some fallen hope that if they remove themselves from the remainder of humanity, Lucifer will ignore them. Most realize that it's only a matter of time before the final showdown.

FALLOUT

The telling blow comes when Lucifer unveils a new tactic in the war against the Earthbound. Taking his cue from the human capacity to disrupt demonic evocations through disbelief, Lucifer trains whole brigades of mortals to use their Faith and will to achieve the same effect, nullifying his enemies' greatest weapons. (This system works identically to the one in *Demon*, p. 254. Make a Willpower roll — difficulty 8 — for every trained mortal in the area when an Earthbound or demon attempts to invoke a power. Each success increases the difficulty of the evocation by one.) With this new tactic and thousands of willing mortals to draw upon, the crusade's final victory is all but assured — and ready to be redirected.

Desperate times make for desperate measures. The crusade drives the fallen into the countryside and the Earthbound, whittled down to a bare handful, are scattered across the globe. The Dread Kings and remaining demons thus find themselves in an uneasy alliance. Eager for any chance to avoid an eternity in the Abyss, the two forces launch a last-ditch plan to break the crusade.

The last story of this stage involves sending the characters on a desperate mission into the heart of enemy territory—the ruins of Los Angeles itself. The characters are chosen because of their wealth of experience dealing with the order. If the characters have maintained covert ties with one or more sympathetic order members, they might even get assistance into and out of the city if it means ending Lucifer's oppressive regime.

The purpose of the mission is to recover the body of Belial, hidden by surviving members of his army. If the characters can return with the corpse (or at least its heart), a weapon can be forged that can kill Lucifer and shatter the crusade.

DAMAGE CONTROL

Again, the characters have little choice but to fight or die. The only point that could derail events is refusal to embark on the mission to recover Belial's body. In that case fallen leaders find another team to recover the Great Beast's mortal shell, and then pressure the characters through shame, fear or direct threats to take part in the culmination of the plan.

THE FINAL SOLUTION

Once Belial's body is recovered it's handed over to infernal servants of the Earthbound. These Malefactors, the finest surviving, create a terrible weapon: a dart of bone, infused with the essence of the Great Beast's hateful heart. It's a tool designed with only one purpose in mind—the death of the Morningstar.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The fallen know that defeat and the Abyss are imminent. With nothing else to lose, they plan on a desperate assassination attempt. If it succeeds, Lucifer's thralls will lose their gifts, crippling the order and hopefully dealing a fatal blow to their morale.

The attempt comes in the guise of a surrender plea. The characters are chosen because of their experience with the order, their knowledge of Los Angeles, or in the interests of involving as few conspirators as possible. The characters are to go as emissaries of the remaining fallen and Earthbound, begging a personal audience with Lucifer to discuss terms. Once in Lucifer's presence, they are meant to strike him down with the dart and hopefully fight their way out in the resulting confusion.

FALLOUT

The plan has every chance of succeeding. Lucifer agrees to an audience. It's in his best interests to end the crusade while there's still some habitable parts of the Earth left. Surrounded by the faithful, he can be sure that the emissaries won't be able to use their evocations, and even in his wounded state a physical confrontation with the First Angel has no chance of success.

The dart, once thrown, flies unerringly to its target. Driven by Belial's implacable enmity, it burrows to Lucifer's heart, destroying the Morningstar forever. The resulting shock and dismay may allow the characters to escape.

The question is not whether the characters can succeed. The question is will they use the dart or not? That's the question on which Lucifer hangs, too. He anticipates that the emissary-characters plot murder. He wouldn't be the First Angel if he did not know. What remains unknown to him is whether the characters will use their weapon and damn themselves and their kind, or prove once and for all that the fallen can be redeemed. Essentially, the Morningstar's whole crusade has led up to this telling moment of free will. The characters' decision will prove that the rebellion was just or a tragic mistake.

The characters decide the fate of Creation as they know it. If they strike down their former prince, they verify Lucifer's long-held fears. The fallen are no longer angels, but monsters concerned only with their personal interests. If the characters stay their hand, they prove to the Morningstar that there is hope to save the angels of the Abyss.

If the characters choose to not use the dart, they can instead use the audience to plead with Lucifer to end the crusade while there's still a world left. If he's shown how easily the characters could have killed him, he's willing to listen to their pleas. In truth, the Lightbringer is not hard to persuade. The horror and destruction of the crusade reminds him too much of the War of Wrath, and he's sick of fighting. If there's a chance that the fallen can be redeemed, he's willing to take it.

If the characters are successful at securing peace, the alliance between the Earthbound and the fallen collapses. The Dread Kings refuse to submit to the Morningstar and fight to the very last. There will be more loss and heartache before the crusade is finished, but now there is hope for tomorrow.

AFTERMATH

Depending on the characters' actions, the world dies or is born again. If they choose to assassinate Lucifer, the crusade is dealt a killing blow, but it isn't enough to save

the surviving demons. The faithful hurl themselves at the fallen and Earthbound with fanatical zeal, using every weapon remaining in their arsenal. When the dust finally settles, no more demons remain and mankind is a tattered handful of maddened, starving souls.

If, however, the characters succeed in securing peace the ravaged world has the potential to be remade. Lucifer and the remaining fallen have the combined power to eventually restore Creation to its former glory—even ushering in a new Age of Wonder as mankind tests the limits of its restored faith.

The last remaining challenge to overcome is the Abyss itself. Are its gates sealed up forever by the force of mankind's devotion, or is there a better solution? Can the remaining imprisoned demons be allowed to return to Earth over time, into a world that is ready for them and prepared to heal them of their pain? Only time will tell.

STORYTELLING THE APOCALYPSE

The end of the world shouldn't be a dread event in a **Demon** chronicle. Rather, it should stand as the culmination of the characters' individual stories, the ultimate test of their convictions and beliefs. As beings who laid the foundations of the Earth and breathed life into humanity, it's only fitting that the fallen play a prominent role in the destruction of both—and that they can offer hope for potential rebirth. Getting the most out of an apocalyptic end requires a lot of careful thought and preparation, choosing just the right theme, mood and style of play to highlight the conflicts that each character must face. Then comes the challenge of setting the stage for the event itself, gradually building tension while giving the players enough time (and warning) to make final preparations before the climactic battle.

The following sections offer comprehensive guidelines for Storytelling an apocalyptic finale to your **Demon** chronicle. Although numerous references are made to the preceding scenarios, this material can be used as a basic outline for *any* closing story that you tell.

SUITABLE THEMES FOR THE END

First decide what themes you want your final story (or stories) to address. A resonant theme creates a sense of continuity between scenes and episodes, and can guide you in planning the course of events (see below).

The end of the world is a unique, dramatically powerful development that demands powerful themes such as redemption, loyalty and honor. This isn't to say that you can't address smaller, more specific themes

like terrorism or politics, but the more specific your choices the more likely they are to be overshadowed by sweeping events. It's tough to keep the story focused on the vagaries of politics when the greater demons of the Abyss war in the skies overhead.

RETURN TO EDEN

Can the world be remade into the paradise it once was? This theme has particular resonance as mankind teeters on the brink of destruction. There are a number of ways to explore this direction, the most important of which focuses on the sacrifices that characters are willing (or unwilling) to make. The characters can be put in a position to choose the scope and outcome of the final battle. Those in "Twilight of the Gods," for example, must choose to commit themselves to a Pyrrhic battle against the Earthbound or surrender and serve the Dread Kings.

If the characters risk everything (including the survival of mankind) by fighting the Earthbound, you can explore this theme in stories of diplomacy and negotiation. They must persuade remaining fallen to remember their origins and fight for humanity's future. But when the final battle begins, the characters still have some painful choices to make. Do they commit themselves to near-suicidal attacks on Earthbound reliquaries, trusting other fallen to protect and nurture mankind in the wake of Armageddon? Do they attempt to protect pockets of human civilization while others risk their lives in battle? If the characters are unwilling to fight and die for their beliefs, what does it say about the righteousness of their cause?

Conversely, if the characters actually take the side of the Dread Kings, do they help enslave or exterminate their fellow demons in the hope of ending the war and preserving the planet? Do they follow orders but secretly nurture plans to overthrow their oppressors? Is it better for mankind to live in slavery rather than be exterminated in a futile struggle?

THE GREATER EVIL

Is it possible to perform evil deeds to serve a greater good? More importantly, should the characters damn themselves for the higher purpose of saving the world? There are a wide variety of ways to address this theme in an apocalyptic scenario, but the best way to do so is to present stories that challenge characters to choose between their ethics and ideals. Again, "Twilight of the Gods" provides numerous possibilities for exploring this theme. If the characters cannot persuade their fellow demons to oppose the Earthbound, should they use their power to *force* the others to fight? If the difference between survival and destruction is surrendering to one's Torment, which do the characters choose? Is it worth pushing the world to the edge of



destruction to defeat the Earthbound if surviving fallen are monsters? At what point is annihilation preferable to damnation?

The same sorts of questions are equally valid if the characters choose to serve the Earthbound rather than oppose them. Is it more evil to enslave mankind rather than destroy him? Is survival worth betraying one's former friends, as the characters are commanded by the Dread Kings to hunt down and enslave — or destroy — remaining fallen?

A WAR OF IDEALS

When the characters first escaped the Abyss, they faced a test of conflicting loyalties. Were they still obligated to serve the interests of their Abyssal overlords, or were they suddenly answerable only to themselves and their beliefs? This theme is just as valid (if not more so) in an apocalyptic scenario, in which ancient feuds threaten the world's survival. The best way to explore this theme is to present situations that force the characters to choose between their personal goals and the agendas of their superiors. "Better to Rule on Earth" provides excellent opportunities to explore this premise. The greater demons emerging from the Pit have the power to rid the world of the Earthbound, but what does the future hold for Earth and mankind under the rule of these monstrous demons? Should the

characters unreservedly support their former masters, or should they band together and assert themselves in the interests of Earth and humanity?

The situation is further complicated when house politics and infernal factions are added to the mix. What course is the most valid for each of the characters? Is it better to follow one's personal philosophy rather than honor ancient loyalties? Should a character put house obligation above all else, knowing that his superiors are hard at work sabotaging the efforts of other fallen for political gain? Are ancient ties of loyalty and brotherhood still valid after all that the fallen have endured, or is annihilation really about breaking old ties and beginning anew?

THE PURSUIT OF REDEMPTION

Are the fallen angels or demons? Can they erase the stain of their Torment? Are they worthy of forgiveness? What if the only way to redeem themselves is to make the ultimate sacrifice? This theme cuts to the heart of what **Demon** is about: Can some sins be undone, and if so, what does that say about God and mankind? The best way to explore this theme in an apocalyptic scenario is to present stories that challenge the characters' commitment to expiating past crimes. What sacrifices do they make? What price do they ultimately pay to overcome the sins of the past?

“Paradise Won” is an excellent example of a scenario that explores this theme. Lucifer raises a human crusade to banish the fallen into the Pit for all time. The Morningstar believes that all of his former compatriots are just as lost to their Torment as the Earthbound. Is he right? As the situation for the fallen grows increasingly desperate, do the characters draw more and more on their dark nature to survive, or do they believe that such acts only make the situation worse? Do they strike back at the Morningstar and his misguided army before the whole world is consumed, or do they suffer the loss of friends and loved ones rather than perpetuate the cycle of violence? And ultimately, when the characters literally hold Lucifer’s life in their hands, do they give in to their anger and fear and slay him or do they risk their lives on a single act of mercy?

THE POWER OF FAITH

As powerful as the fallen and Earthbound are, without the gift of Faith from mankind they are little more than tortured spirits. Humanity, by the same token, cannot achieve its true glory without a connection to its inherent divinity, as evidenced by the World of Darkness and its poisonous cynicism. This theme poses questions about the nature of faith and the courage to trust in a higher purpose, contrary to all available evidence. It works best in stories in which the characters can overcome the perils of Armageddon by awakening and empowering a faithless human race. Instead of pursuing a wasteful and destructive battle against the Earthbound, the characters are presented with the option of showing mankind how to empower itself to overcome the Dread Kings — and by extension the fallen themselves. Do the characters cede their power to mortals, knowing that it will forever alter — or reverse — their relationship with humanity? Do the characters have the courage to place their future in the hands of mankind? Are they willing to risk subordinating themselves to their own creations for the good of all? How far are the characters willing to go in regard to their fellow demons? Not every fallen sees the wisdom in surrendering celestial authority to humanity, especially when there’s no guarantee that mankind can handle such power. Are the characters willing to fight their former compatriots to bring their plans to fruition? Are they willing to accept the consequences if things go wrong?

MULTIPLE THEMES

Don’t feel constrained to stick to a single theme when planning your chronicle’s end. Multiple themes add depth and broaden the challenges that characters face as the game reaches its conclusion. Themes of divided loyalty and the search for redemption can go hand in hand, for example, with

different situations emphasizing different aspects of the characters’ conflicts. It’s a good rule of thumb to limit yourself to one major theme and up to two minor but related themes per story. Any more than that and you risk watering down events’ impact by asking too many questions at the same time. If your primary theme is redemption, two appropriate minor themes might be the perils of violence (anger begets anger) and the need for the forgiveness of one’s peers. Trying to address redemption, divided loyalties and whether it’s possible for the fallen to return the world to an Edenic state is a lot of ground to cover in a single story.

SUITABLE MOODS FOR THE END

Where themes help focus the action of the story, the proper mood brings dramatic weight to the characters’ conflicts and helps build a sense of tension as events unfold. The following are some suggested moods that are appropriate in a story of celestial beings struggling for the future of Creation.

INSTABILITY

Well before your end scenario begins, it’s a good idea to hint that the world is coming apart. In the early stages you can emphasize societal details — an increase in crime, a slow decline in the effectiveness of the police, increasing corruption at city hall. As time passes, this instability grows in scale. National governments are mired in scandal and elected leaders behave erratically. Tensions between nations increase. Diplomatic situations boil over into outright warfare. Alliances are broken or cast aside. Traditions are forgotten.

As you relate events leading up to the apocalypse, this instability becomes more fundamental and profound. Basic services in cities and towns are unpredictable. Economies plunge. Sickness and disease run rampant and doctors are helpless to stem the tide. The rule of law is increasingly discarded in favor of personal gain.

Finally, when the end is at hand, even the natural order comes undone. Bizarre weather patterns wrack the globe. The sun no longer rises at predictable times. The moon no longer follows its phases. Fire no longer produces heat, and lights grow a little dimmer with each passing night.

The fallen should be especially sensitive to these obvious changes. Each time they use their Supernatural Awareness ability look for ways to hint that the fabric of Creation itself frays. Slayers suspect that the Veil thins no matter where they go, while Scourges sense that winds lose their strength or flow in chaotic patterns. Fiends in particular sense that the Grand

Design becomes increasingly unstable, like an unbalanced gyroscope that threatens to rip itself apart.

SPIRITUALITY

As the world grows increasingly unstable and human society splinters under the strain, you can insert a growing atmosphere of spirituality and apocalyptic fever. Books and newspapers focus on the “end times” and prophecy. The media is full of reports of strange cults and religious leaders exhorting the faithful to prepare for a cataclysm. Wild-eyed “prophets” appear on street corners, declaring that time is running out. Religion becomes a more prominent fixture in society, but it takes on a dark, fatalistic tone. Look for opportunities to introduce religious symbolism in the characters’ surroundings. Prominent churches, religious graffiti on buildings, and bleak, decaying graveyards are good examples.

LOSS

As the world’s instability grows and society wrestles with its belief in the divine, there should be a growing sense of loss among mortals and the fallen. Beliefs, customs and institutions that were once fixtures fall into disuse and decay. People die from sudden illness, violence or even suicide. Fires and earthquakes consume buildings that have stood for hundreds of years, leaving nothing but rubble and no hope of repair. Governments fail, moral authorities are discredited, friendships are strained and broken. These can be personal losses for the characters, or the fallen can simply bear witness to others’ suffering everywhere they turn. There should be a growing sense that the world as everyone knows it is ending, and nothing anyone can do will stop it. There’s no thought of looking hopefully to the future, only a sense of mourning for the past and a growing sense of fear and frustration as people wait for the next person, place or thing to be taken from them.

AWE

Finally, as the apocalypse begins and demons and Earthbound struggle in the streets, look for ways to inspire a sense of awe and wonder as celestial beings walk openly. Powerful demons speak with voices of thunder that shatter windows. Fiery Devils leave blazing trails in the sky. Defilers wreath themselves in robes of mist and lightning. The Earthbound raise armies of grotesque thralls and frantic cultists. The Dread Kings themselves manifest their apocalyptic forms before seas of shrieking worshippers. When demons and mortals clash, the destruction is enormous. Hundreds die to bullets, claws, blazing swords and sheets of lightning. Cities become blazing wastelands as glowing beings hurl thunderbolts. Malefactors

splinter mountains and rain boulders on their foes. As the situation grows increasingly desperate, nuclear weapons are used against Earthbound strongholds or seats of demonic power. The end of the Earth is a war of fallen gods, and the characters should be conscious of the power that they and their peers unleash across the globe.

INVOLVING THE PLAYERS

Once you’ve settled on the story, theme and mood of your apocalypse, the next challenge is to make the players’ characters an integral part of it all. With powerful figures such as Lucifer, the Earthbound and the greater demons of the Pit squaring off, it’s easy for the characters (who could be powerful in their own right, but not *that* powerful) to be spectators. The best way to make them integral participants is to confront them with crucial decisions that affect the whole outcome of the struggle. The characters’ contribution to the apocalypse shouldn’t be about how powerful they are or how many cities they destroy, but about the choices they make. In “Twilight of the Gods,” for example, the characters are far from the most powerful demons in the conflict, but their experience and stature is such that they can create a final alliance of potent fallen. In “Paradise Won,” the characters are the emissaries of the most powerful surviving demons, but they literally hold Lucifer’s life in their hands. The choice they make affects not only their future, but humanity’s.

Once you identify critical points at which the characters can affect the outcome of the apocalypse, put them in a position to make those important choices. The best way to accomplish that is to set the stage well in advance, positioning the characters before the last story takes place rather than forcing a role on them on the spur of the moment. There are various ways to set the stage for the characters’ involvement.

A CENTRAL SETTING

The most effective way to make the characters pivotal is to make their setting central to the coming conflict. “Better to Rule on Earth” accomplishes this by making the characters’ home the seat of the first greater demon to escape the Abyss. “Paradise Won” allows you to draw characters into the action by making the local chapter house a prominent fixture in Lucifer’s crusade. This approach requires a lot of advance work on your part, establishing the significance of the characters’ home (and local court) over numerous stories leading up to the apocalypse. But as the characters’ ties to the setting grow (along with their stature and influence), they are ideally positioned to make important decisions that affect the chronicle’s outcome.

PROMINENT ALLIES OR ENEMIES

The characters' court superiors, compatriots or enemies are central figures in the conflict to come. If the characters owe their allegiance to a particular minister or tyrant who then becomes a powerful vassal to a greater demon or a leader in the resistance against the Earthbound, the characters could be called upon to perform crucial tasks that affect the unfolding end. If the characters' primary antagonist is an Earthbound, for example, their long-running struggle could lead them to a position of crucial importance in building support for a final struggle against the Dread Kings as a whole. This option presents the characters' significance as a logical and organic product of objectives they've pursued over the course of the chronicle, rather than suddenly imposing an unfamiliar role on them.

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Another way to make the characters a focus of the apocalypse is to frame the conflict in a way that makes their individual beliefs fundamental to the conflict. This approach works best if the characters all adhere to the same faction or house, but it isn't absolutely necessary. If the characters believe strongly in protecting mankind or restoring Earth to its former glory (whether they're Reconcilers or not), the surviving leaders of the fallen share the characters' values and are desperate for all the help they can get. Or you can create similar motivation by making the leaders' beliefs the *opposite* of the characters'. Suppose that surviving fallen leaders are Raveners who don't care how the apocalypse ends so long as the world is reduced to ashes? This situation compels compassionate characters to take action for the sake of their beliefs and charges.

ANSWERING THE BIG QUESTIONS

As you work out the specifics of your apocalyptic scenario, you may also want to address some of the bigger questions posed by **Demon**. Namely, the role God and Heaven played in the fall, the Creator's subsequent disappearance after the war, and Lucifer's motives for the rebellion. The end of the world is the ultimate act of closure. It's likely that players ask these questions at some point, so it's best to decide ahead of time how they factor into your stories. If you don't want to touch on these topics during the course of your stories, that's acceptable, too. Preserving the mystery of the Creator's actions adds weight to the characters' dilemmas and makes their choices all the more momentous.

There are no hard-and-fast answers to the central mysteries of **Demon**. You're encouraged to answer questions about God, Lucifer and the angels in

whatever way is most appropriate to your chronicle. The following are some suggestions to consider, modify or discard.

GOD

Since the end of the war, the Cryptics have wrestled with numerous questions regarding the Creator and His actions. Did He not foresee the rebellion? Could He not have easily defeated the fallen had He chosen to? Why entomb the fallen in the Abyss instead of destroying them utterly? How could His eternal prison have been broken? And most importantly, where has He gone? The following are different possible answers to these questions.

- **It was all part of the plan.** God did foresee the fall. Indeed, He wished it to occur all along to create a situation in which humanity would be forced to choose between Him and Lucifer. This approach implies that the War of Wrath was a foregone conclusion, permitted to occur only to make the fallen a credible choice when compared to the all-powerful but impersonal Creator. The creation of the Abyss was a means of keeping the fallen viable as a choice to humanity yet keeping the demons from interfering too much in the growth of mortal civilization. The escape of the fallen was also planned, implying that humanity would be at a crucial point in its evolution — it would have to choose one final time between serving the rebel angels or placing faith in an unseen God. If humanity were to choose the latter it's possible that Heaven might finally make its presence known once the apocalypse had run its course, saving the survivors of the human race and heralding a new era of existence.

- **God is dead.** God may have foreseen the fall, but took no action to prevent it, believing that His angels had to choose to serve Him of their own free will. When they rebelled the Creator was consumed with grief and rage, and in his agony smote Creation with so much of His power that He effectively ceased to exist as a separate entity. This was the terrible blow described in Chapter One of the **Demon** rulebook that began the slow erosion of Creation. God's essence suffused the cosmos like spilled blood, finding its way into every element of existence — including the souls of humanity. In the wake of His death, the angels fought the War of Wrath alone, upholding their duty as the only remaining way to honor their Creator. It was the winners who created the Abyss, and that's why the construct was ultimately imperfect and doomed to collapse.

Now, as the fallen tear at one another in the throes of apocalypse, loyal angels look on from the ruins of Heaven and might intercede once the terrible events have run their course.



• **God has abandoned the universe.** God did not foresee the fall. His angels, like humanity, had free will. When the fallen chose to break His commandments the Creator decided that His creation was forever flawed. He smote the universe in the wake of Lucifer's rebellion and then abandoned it, perhaps turning His attention to creating yet another cosmos in a different corner of the Void. The angels fought in God's absence, and though victory was theirs it was ultimately a hollow triumph, leaving them too weak to maintain the Grand Design as the Creator commanded. The survivors may still linger in the fastness of Heaven, and may be persuaded to intercede once the final battle begins.

THE HEAVENLY HOST

While the fallen grew accustomed to the absence of the Creator over the course of the war, the absence of the heavenly host came as a profound shock to the newly escaped demons. Had the angels left the cosmos with the Creator? Had they suffered even greater losses in the war than realized? Or were angels still loyal to Heaven being held in state to await the day when the final battle would begin and the ultimate fate of the fallen and mankind would be decided? The following are possible answers to these questions.

• **The angels are gone.** When the Creator abandoned the cosmos, He took His loyal angels with Him to create a new universe and tend to it. The angels fought

the war according to the Creator's wishes, and built the Abyss according to His desires, but without any celestial beings maintaining it or repairing the damage wrought by human actions the prison eventually broke down. The fallen are the only celestials left in the cosmos, and the choices they make in the final days decide the future of Creation.

• **There are only a few angels left.** The heavenly host suffered far more terrible losses than the fallen knew during the war, and is now only a shadow of its former glory. The Creator is unwilling to create more Elohim to replenish the ranks, and thus angels are unable to make any sweeping changes to Creation or to keep it from sliding inexorably into ruin. The remainder of the host remains in Heaven, awaiting the Creator's commands, and may or may not make its presence felt once the final battle begins.

• **The angels wait in Heaven for the final battle.** The heavenly host did not emerge unscathed from its long war against the rebels. A thousand years of death, destruction and atrocity left deep scars, fundamentally altering the loyal from the divine beings they once were and leaving most of them unfit to serve as God's intermediaries with mankind. Thus, the vast bulk of the host was placed in a state of limbo in the halls of Heaven, kept in readiness for the day of the apocalypse. They may

await the Creator's command to save mankind from the horrors of the final battle, or must be summoned by a collective plea from humanity itself and thus may or may not take part in Armageddon.

LUCIFER

The Morningstar is the source of nearly as much speculation among the fallen as are the actions of the Creator Himself. Many Cryptics (and no small number of Luciferans) have a variety of questions to pose to their former leader. Did he collude with God all along?

Did he cut a deal with the Creator at the end of the war, betraying the fallen in exchange for his own freedom? Did he find a way to escape his imprisonment and has been working to free the fallen ever since?

The answers to many of these questions are explored to some degree in **City of Angels** and **Demon: The Earthbound**. If you do not have either of those books, his actual fate is summarized here.

Lucifer, leader of the rebellion against Heaven, was not destroyed by God as many of the fallen believe.

THE RETURN OF THE ANGELS

If you want to include angels in your apocalyptic story you can use the basic powers and abilities presented for the fallen, with the following changes.

- Angels don't have physical bodies *per se*. They appear in one of the apocalyptic forms of their houses (see below), but these bodies are constructs of pure faith. There is no Faith cost to create a form. As long as an angel has one point of available Faith it can maintain its appearance. Evocations such as Lore of the Flesh that affect a physical body have no effect on angels.
- Angels have no Torment rating.
- All angels have 10 Willpower. They can spend Willpower points for automatic successes just as the fallen can, and regain Willpower in the same fashion that fallen characters do.
- Low-ranking angels have a Faith rating of 25. Mid-ranking angels have a Faith rating of 35 to 45. High-ranking angels have a Faith rating of 50 to 65. Angels regain all Faith at the beginning of each day. Additionally, they can reap Faith from mortals in a manner similar to the fallen. If an angel is reduced to zero Faith he disincorporates instantly and returns to Heaven until dawn of the following day.
- Angels cannot create thralls.
- All angels have five dots in each of their Attributes. They do not have Talents, Skills or Knowledges. They can attempt any action they wish, rolling a dice pool equal to Attribute + a number of bonus dice generated by spending Faith points. There is no limit to the number of bonus dice that can be applied to a roll beyond the number of Faith points an angel has available to spend.
- Angels have all the same innate powers as the fallen, although they are immune to most damage (see below).
- Angels have the same apocalyptic forms as the fallen, but they do not have high-Torment aspects. Angels are always considered to be in apocalyptic form, but can manifest only low-Torment aspects. If

you have a copy of the **Demon Players Guide** and want to use the apocalyptic form guidelines presented in Chapter Five, you are welcome to do so. Angels can have only four form aspects, and no high-Torment aspects. Additionally, you may use only 10 form points instead of 16.

- Angels are limited to the common lore paths and their house lore paths. This includes powers such as the Lore of Humanity and the Lore of the Realms, which were created by the fallen during the war but were eventually adopted by the Elohim as well. Low-ranking angels have 15 dots to allocate among available lore paths. Mid-ranking angels have 20 dots. High-ranking angels possess five dots in all of their available lore paths. Furthermore, Faith points may be spent to increase the range or area of effect of evocations. If range or area of effect is measured in yards, an angel can increase each at a rate of 10 yards per Faith point. If area of effect is measured in miles, an angel can increase it by 10 miles per Faith point. Faith points can also be spent to add dice to evocation rolls, as the fallen can do.

- Angels are immune to bashing and lethal damage of all types. Additionally, they can heal aggravated damage at the cost of five Faith points per health level. Apply wound penalties for aggravated damage as normal. Low-ranking angels can sustain 10 levels of aggravated damage before they are destroyed. Mid-ranking angels can suffer 15 levels of aggravated damage before they are destroyed. High-ranking angels can suffer 25 levels of aggravated damage before they are destroyed. Angels do not heal naturally — Faith has to be spent to repair any damage. If an angel runs out of Faith and is forced to return to Heaven, she retains her injuries until she has enough Faith to heal herself.

- Angels can be consumed in the same manner as the fallen. Their True Names can be learned through occult research or by studying the results of their evocations. They cannot be summoned or bound, however, by virtue of their connection to the Creator.

Nor was he exiled to a separate Hell where the Creator could take personal interest in His torment. For reasons known only to the Almighty, Lucifer was, like his fellow rebels, stripped of much of his power but left to spend eternity wandering the Earth.

For a time Lucifer could only watch helplessly as God's angels, like an occupying army, had their way with mankind. Some civilizations were spared while others were destroyed. The war was over but the suffering of mankind continued, to say nothing of the agonies that Lucifer's followers endured in the Abyss. Grief turned to outrage, then finally to bitter hate. There would be a reckoning, Lucifer vowed. For the sake of the fallen and humanity, God would answer for what He had done. From that moment, Lucifer, bringer of light, became *Shaitan* the great enemy of Heaven.

Drawing on his experience during the rebellion, Lucifer resumed his influence over mankind. He knew humanity's ability to innovate all too well, and if they had the right tools they could accomplish anything, including penetrate the Abyss. Over centuries, Lucifer cultivated the practice of sorcery, and his patience was finally rewarded. Babylonian sorcerers pierced the darkness and summoned five of Lucifer's lieutenants back into the world. The five were the first of the Earthbound, and through them Lucifer intended to resume his efforts to direct humanity's evolution and free the rest of the fallen. But the archangel did not realize how terrible the suffering in the Abyss was. By the time he had reached his compatriots they had been transformed into nightmarish beings. They still understood Lucifer's plan for harnessing mankind, but their vision for the future was something more terrible than even God could imagine. What's more, Lucifer's absence in the eternal prison was seen by many as the worst of betrayals. Where he had once been their glorious leader, now he was the Prince of Lies. When Lucifer tried to get the Earthbound to follow his vision for humanity, they turned on him at once.

What followed was a long, running battle that has raged across history to the present day. While the numbers of the Earthbound swelled to 666, Lucifer fought a losing struggle to contain their influence worldwide, finally adopting the spiritual equivalent of a "scorched earth policy" by attacking spiritual institutions and fostering rational thought over faith. The greatest feat the devil ever pulled off was convincing mankind that he didn't exist — though for reasons that no human in his right mind would ever have believed.

Based on this background you can approach Lucifer and his motives from a number of different perspectives.

- **Lucifer was following orders.** The fall occurred because God needed there to be evil in the

universe as an alternative choice for humans. Lucifer was asked to pose that choice, leading as many angels into rebellion against Heaven as he could. He did so believing that once the rebellion was finished the rebels would be forgiven and humanity, having made its choice one way or the other, would grow in accordance with its wishes. What the Morningstar didn't expect was the curse of mortality and the need to constantly tempt succeeding generations of humans until the end of time. Lucifer feels betrayed by the Creator and wants to see justice done for his compatriots. He may consider the fallen to be irredeemable monsters, but he will make Heaven pay for its actions all the same.

- **Lucifer rebelled of his own free will.** Like humanity, the angels were given a choice: serve God or defy the will of Heaven. Lucifer was truly moved by humanity's plight and led the rebels out of the belief that mankind deserved to make informed choices about its destiny. When the war ended he was left to wander the Earth apart from his compatriots as punishment for his sins. He could not even share in the suffering of the fallen, instead becoming the brunt of their unjust hatred. Now, with the final battle at hand, Lucifer seeks to redeem himself as well as the fallen, proving that their cause was righteous all along.

- **Lucifer sold out.** Lucifer's initial desire to rebel was far from altruistic. He was jealous of mankind's worship of the Creator, and deceived the fallen into rallying under the pretense of giving mankind the knowledge it deserved. Instead, he sought to supplant the Creator in mankind's eyes. He even succeeded for a time until the Babel Project resulted in catastrophe. Fearing the Creator's wrath, the Morningstar tried to cut a deal with Michael, offering to betray the infernal host in return for clemency. Michael agreed, and Lucifer ordered the surrender of his followers. He sat impassively as the fallen were sentenced to the Abyss, and when the last of the rebels disappeared into the darkness he expected a mild punishment and a return to his duties. Instead, he found himself stripped of much of his power and sentenced to walk the Earth until the end of time, when the Abyss would break open and the fallen would exact revenge for his betrayal. Furious at what he felt to be a betrayal by Michael and the Creator, Lucifer at first attempted to free his closest lieutenants and renew the rebellion, only to discover that they had become consumed with hatred for him. Now the Morningstar struggles to preserve mankind and banish or destroy the fallen in an effort to conceal the truth of his crime. If he succeeds, humanity may eventually become powerful enough under his leadership to challenge Heaven once again.

STORYTELLING STYLES

Once you've settled on the basics of your apocalyptic story, the final element to consider is the style in which you'd like to tell the tale. While it would seem self-evident that any story detailing the end would naturally require a high-drama, operatic presentation, you can easily tell a cinematic or apocalyptic story as well. It primarily depends on the nature of the characters' conflicts and the scope of the challenges you pose to them. It's even possible to mix styles between stories if you wish, allowing you to explore different perspectives and levels of action to bring the chronicle to a rousing conclusion.

STORYTELLING AN OPERATIC APOCALYPSE

Operatic stories deal with concepts on a grand scale. The actions and ambitions of the characters are larger than life, and the consequences of their decisions are monumental. Gritty realism takes a backseat to bold, dynamic stories in which fallen angels stride the Earth like titans, and entire nations are laid waste. Operatic stories are pure melodrama, but they free you to concentrate on telling exciting, action-filled stories that don't require tons of subtlety or attention to mundane details.

Telling an operatic apocalypse seems the most natural style for the subject matter at hand, at least at first glance. The stakes of the conflict can't get any higher, as powerful demons unleash the most potent weapons available to annihilate their enemies. If you want to focus on a story that embodies global conflicts, and the characters' actions have consequences for not only hundreds of fallen but hundreds of millions of human beings, an operatic style is the way to go. The sky is the limit. You can equip characters with powerful artifacts, destroy cities with terrible rituals or devastating nuclear weapons, and slay Earthbound foes in fearsome hand-to-hand combat. Mortal concerns are abandoned and the characters act as the fallen angels they were in ancient times.

The disadvantage to this style is the fact that mortal concerns fall by the wayside in favor of over-the-top action. What's the loss of a character's human lover amid thousands of other deaths? Why defend a single town, even the characters' hometown, when armies of demons and thralls devastate entire continents? Once the characters become vengeful gods they lose much of their humanity, which in turn cheapens the consequences of the choices they make.

"Twilight of the Gods" lends itself very well to the operatic style of play, particularly as the Earthbound grow in power and the fallen are forced to make a desperate choice between surrendering to the Dread Kings or taking a final stand. The focus of the story is

global. It has less to do with the characters' mortal ties, and more to do with their nature as angels.

STORYTELLING A CINEMATIC APOCALYPSE

Cinematic stories occupy the middle ground between the operatic and visceral. The characters are supernatural creatures with human cares and relationships. In a sense they exist in two worlds, and their toughest struggles often involve keeping those worlds from colliding. Cinematic stories contrast the mundane against the supernatural. The fallen fight dynamic, desperate battles against monstrous demons and the Earthbound for the sake of the mortals they love. The struggle to balance the two aspects of the characters' existence provides a wealth of possibilities for gripping stories that combine realism and wonder.

Storytelling a cinematic apocalypse provides you with the best of both worlds. There are opportunities for epic action in the context of the characters' mortal existence. The scope of the action is not quite so broad or so over the top as an operatic approach, focusing instead on a local scale that has global implications. The characters fight huge battles against fearsome monsters. They may walk openly as mighty demons, but they retain ties to their human friends and allies, and the choices they make must take these human souls into account. Rather than treating mankind as cannon fodder or a prize to be wrestled over, the characters consider mortals to be companions with an equal stake in what happens to the world.

"Better to Rule on Earth" is a good example of a cinematic apocalypse, with vastly powerful demons returning to Earth and fighting a climactic war for the fate of mankind. The characters are caught up in the epic struggle, but their perspective is colored by their human memories and emotions. The choices they make specifically address the future of humanity in the aftermath of the war.

STORYTELLING A VISCERAL APOCALYPSE

Visceral stories are about human characters with demons lurking beneath the skin. Rather than face a world-spanning epic or a clash of titans, the characters struggle to hold onto their humanity in the face of supernatural temptation. These stories are about characters' personal struggles. They work best with a very tight focus and a small scale, centering on the characters' human lives and the effect their true natures have on everyone and everything around them.

Storytelling a visceral end is about contrasting the characters' mortal existence against the epic nature of the conflict at work. Their feelings, relationships and inner struggles take precedent over ancient feuds or vengeance against Lucifer. Rather than focus on conflicts that show how the characters turn the tide in a

war between demons, you address how the characters *survive* the conflict raging around them, and the choices they make for good or ill. They may not survive. Worse, they may escape only by sacrificing the parts of their souls that they hold most dear. This storytelling style is short on action, but can inspire intense roleplaying sessions as the characters wrestle with the monsters within.

“Paradise Won” lends itself well to this style of play. Rather than focus on the global spread of the order, you can tell a story focused on the arrival of the chapter house in the characters’ town, and the changes it brings. As events progress and mortals’ Faith increases, the characters are in a position to redefine relationships with thralls and mortal companions. Then, as the war against the Earthbound opens and Lucifer transforms human society into a police state, the characters struggle to protect their mortal charges from other humans — and possibly each other. Only at the end of the story, when the characters are sent on a mission to kill their former leader, does the focus expand to include more than just the characters’ immediate plight. Even then, the choice the characters make depends more on the quality of their humanity than on their nature as demons.

COMBINING STYLES

As stated previously, don’t feel constrained to stick to just one style of storytelling for your apocalypse, particularly if you’re spreading events over multiple stories. Varying the scope and impact of the characters’ actions allows you to explore the situation from different viewpoints. The trick is to perceive storytelling styles as a scale or spectrum rather than as three separate approaches. An operatic story segues well into a cinematic story, but not directly into a visceral one. It’s odd and a little jarring for characters to lead an army of demons and thralls in an assault on an Earthbound stronghold, and then turn around and worry about finding food for their mortal family members.

If you want to combine styles, make it a gradual progression up and down the scale. You can start with the characters struggling to protect their loved ones from cult gangs. In the next story they are summoned before the tyrant and ordered to confront the cultists and their thrall leaders in open battle. There’s a progression into a broader campaign against the cultists’ Earthbound master, seeking out its lair and destroying its reliquary. Once the spirit is destroyed the characters return to the court and you can tell a story of infernal politics as the tyrant and his ministers wrestle with the need to openly seize control of the city. Finally, with plans underway for an occupation of

the town, you can return the characters to a more visceral story. They are faced with the dilemma of defying the tyrant while spiriting their families away before loved ones are harmed.

AFTER THE FIRE

Does Armageddon necessarily mean an end to your chronicle? Not at all. In fact, of all the World of Darkness games, **Demon** is the least constrained by such climactic events. To the fallen, the end of one world is the beginning of another. They are not beings who quail at scenes of global devastation or who are daunted by the possibility of aeons of struggle to rebuild Eden. They created the cosmos once. They can — and will — do it again given half a chance. But it will not be the same world as before, nor will the demons’ relationships with humanity be the same.

Any chronicle that continues in the aftermath of the apocalypse may be as much about the fallen redefining their relationships with mankind as about the reconstruction of the Earth itself. Humanity has witnessed the wrath of fallen gods, but it’s also learned that people hold the keys to power. Mankind will no longer submit itself to the fallen in blind faith, offering the divine spark only for fleeting gifts. If either race is to survive, they must find new ways to interact with one another, forging a common destiny that may one day leave demons behind. If humans have the spark of divinity within, it stands to reason that they will one day grow into power and eclipse the fallen. But if humanity can evolve, can’t the fallen grow and change as well? Mankind has been shown the seed of its own glory. Could mortals in turn show the fallen a path to a new kind of existence?

Could that have been the Creator’s plan all along?

THE ROLE OF THE MORNINGSTAR

If you choose to continue your chronicle beyond the apocalypse, some consideration must be given to the role that Lucifer plays in the new world order. Should the Morningstar survive, would he resume his role as Prince of the Fallen, determined to lead demons and mortals alike into a new Age of Wonder? Is he treated like a traitor, possibly even brought to trial for his actions against humanity? Or does he remain an enigmatic figure, wandering and sharing his vast store of experience where it’s needed most? (He has observed and guided humanity longer than recorded history, after all.) If Lucifer survives the end of the old world, he’s not the sort of character to slide quietly into obscurity, and his actions in the wake of the final battle could provide a springboard for a new series set in a post-apocalyptic world.



The end has begun.

CHAPTER 3

HUNTER:

THE RECKONING

"INHERIT THE EARTH"

He that overcometh shall inherit all things.

— Revelation 21:7

INTRODUCTION

It had to end like this. From the beginning, **Hunter: The Reckoning** has pointed unerringly toward the end of the World of Darkness. Maybe the game and its common-man heroes were fated for such a finale. Hunters' emergence coinciding with a flood of spirits from the next world was both a herald of and hope against Judgment Day. The dead walking again was an unmistakable portent of the end of the world. Yet, hunters' immediate conflict with restless spirits suggested that they were intended as a response to that menace. The appearance of the imbued may suggest that some force or power sought to help the world rather than watch it die. Indeed, that helpful intent was demonstrated again and again, when the imbued confronted blood drinkers, shapechangers, wizards and demons.

Whether the existence of the chosen ultimately marks or mitigates Armageddon is up to you. Like all chapters of this book, "Inherit the Earth" is intended to provide ideas and possibilities for how your chronicle

might close — or how it might take a whole new direction. Maybe hunters' efforts to destroy monsters, to save monsters or to see a bigger picture beyond them is enough to stave off ruin. And even if it's not, perhaps a new world can rise from the ashes of the old. Whether it will contain monsters and unlikely champions depends on the successes that hunters achieve now. While the fate of this world might be sealed, hunters could stop corruption from spreading to a new Golden Age. If they can, their struggles, loss, pain and suffering are not in vain.

This chapter is intended for Storyteller eyes only. If you're a player who's going to run a character in an end chronicle, come on. You know better than to read this stuff. What you *can* check out is the next few pages' worth of documents and artifacts from the fading world. They're items that your character may lay his hands and eyes on. It's probably best to check with your Storyteller, all the same. You don't know what surprises he has in store for you, and you shouldn't ruin any of them. They could be your last in the World of Darkness.

Email Program

Subject: Where's Witness?

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: nurse216

Copied To:

Send Message Get Messages

Has anyone on the list heard or received messages from Witness1 recently? It's got to be at least a month since he posted anything. I don't want to believe that something's happened to him, but I don't like this silence.

Meteorologists Warn of Temperature Extremes

Blazing Summers and Freezing Winters

cases, are unable to cover their own costs. According to a proposal out-lined...

Commentators Find Pontiff's Tone "Alarming"

Yesterday, Pope John Paul II issued a papal proclamation condemning the growing trend in violence, militarism, atheism and "pagan idolatry" across the world. In itself, that's nothing new. The Pope regularly condemns violence and war, and has spoken out against the New Age movement and other fringe beliefs before.

What makes this proclamation unusual, commentators say, is the harsh language and imagery used by the Pope. In the past, the pontiff has been a firm but benevolent advisor. This time he's speaking more like a fire-and-brimstone preacher:

"We have forgotten Christ's teachings, have forgotten God's commandments, and we have drowned the world in the blood of the innocent..."

"No longer will the Lord suffer the sins committed by the warmongers and the destroyers of His paradise..."

"Those who would sully their immortal souls with witchcraft and idolatry will be faced by the consequences of their sins..."

"We stand on the brink of Armageddon, and the final hour is almost upon us. And in that hour, God's punishment will fall upon us all..."

A full version of the proclamation can be found here.

Some Catholic bishops and church leaders have sought to distance themselves from the Pope's statement, calling it "alarmist" and "needlessly distressing." Several commentators have begun to question whether the Pope's advanced age and debilitating case of Parkinson's Disease have led to the onset of senile dementia. But others call this "a welcome wake-up call for the world" and "a bold and courageous stance."

Initial statements from Vatican officials hinted at translation errors in the proclamation, but those comments have since been withdrawn. In fact, the Vatican is oddly silent about the whole affair, even after the White House apparently sent an envoy to ask for a full explanation. If you'd like to comment on this story or other current events, please visit our forums.

CK: WE'RE BACK NOW WITH THE CHARLIE KRONGOLD SHOW. I'M CHARLIE KRONGOLD. OUR GUEST TODAY IS LILA MARTIN, AUTHOR OF THE BOOK, *FINAL ABSOLUTION: THE FIRST TRIBULATION*. LILA, WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT YOUR BOOK AND THAT YOU FEEL THAT THE END OF THE WORLD IS COMING, AND HAS BEEN FOR QUITE SOME TIME.

LM: THAT'S CORRECT.

CK: AND NOW IT'S TIME FOR SOME QUESTIONS. OUR FIRST CALLER IDENTIFIES HIMSELF AS "BOOKWORM," FROM RALEIGH-DURHAM.

LM: OH, GOOD, I'M A BOOKWORM, TOO.

CK: CALLER, GO AHEAD.

BW: I'D LIKE TO TAKE EXCEPTION TO MRS. MARTIN'S—

LM: MISS MARTIN. I'M NOT MARRIED.

BW: MISS MARTIN'S TAKE ON THE END OF THE WORLD. YOU'RE A CATASTROPHIC MILLENNIALIST. YOU FEEL THAT THE END TIMES ARE COMING AND THAT THEY WILL CULMINATE IN PHYSICAL DISASTERS. TIDAL WAVES, METEORS, DISEASE. YOU EVEN POINT OUT THAT SOLAR FLARE ACTIVITY IS UNUSUALLY HIGH AND THAT THE SUN MAY DIE.

LM: YES.

BW: BUT WHAT ABOUT PROGRESSIVE MILLENNIALISM? YOU DON'T TAKE INTO ACCOUNT SOCIAL REFORM, OR EVEN ANY HOPE OF FORESTALLING THE END. WHAT ABOUT INVOKING A DIVINE OR COSMIC PLAN ACCORDING TO PERSONAL CHANGE OR WORK WITHIN THE COMMUNITY?

LM: I ASSURE YOU, ARMAGEDDON, WHEN IT COMES, WON'T BE SOMETHING WE CAN STOP. THE FAITHFUL WILL BE SAVED WITH THE RAPTURE, BUT NO AMOUNT OF SOCIAL REFORM CAN STOP THE OCEANS FROM BOILING OVER.

BW: WHAT? THIS ISN'T ABOUT BEING FAITHFUL. IT'S ABOUT BEING GOOD. YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THE COMING END, BUT WRONG ABOUT STOPPING IT. SOCIETY HAS BEEN CORRUPTED AND IT'S ALLOWED TERRIBLE THINGS TO HAPPEN. THERE ARE MONSTERS — REAL, ACTUAL MONSTERS IN THE STREETS. BLOOD-DRINKING THING, THINGS THAT CHANGE INTO ANIMALS! WE'VE ALLOWED THEM TO RULE BECAUSE SOCIETY HAS LOST ITS VIRTUE! BUT IT CAN STILL BE REGAINED. THE END CAN BE—

CK: CALLER? BOOKWORM? WE LOST THE CONNECTION. YOUR THOUGHTS ON WHAT BOOKWORM SAID, LILA?

LM: UH... I ONLY WISH HE WAS RIGHT, CHARLIE. DISASTER CANNOT BE AVERTED.

"Fountain of Blood" Erupts in Sydney

Scientists Baffled, Church Leaders Call for Faith

Die einen sind hier, um Deutsch zu lernen, die anderen um ihre Seele. Die Art der Lehre ist hier auch

Investigation Continues into Drifter's Murder

KANSAS — Police are still investigating the murder of Wendell Delburton, whose body was discovered Saturday in a wheat field outside Wichita. Delburton, a traveler with no fixed address, was impaled through the throat with some kind of stabbing implement.

Police say that Delburton was a former Marine and pro-life activist, and that the killing may be related to claims that he was involved in attacks on abortion clinics in 1997. Anyone with more information on Delburton's activities is urged to contact the FBI.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE TALKS DISRUPTED BY GUNMEN

EXPLOSION LEVELS WEST BANK COMPLEX

ANNOUNCER: AND ON THE LIGHTER SIDE OF THE NEWS, UFO REPORTS HAVE APPARENTLY SKYROCKETED IN THE LAST MONTH, WITH OVER A THOUSAND PEOPLE IN THE TRI-STATE AREA CLAIMING TO HAVE SEEN LIGHTS IN THE SKY OR CREATURES ROAMING THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS. MAYBE THEY'RE ALL COMING FOR THE STATE FAIR NEXT WEEKEND, EH, JERRY?

SECOND ANNOUNCER: I...

SECOND ANNOUNCER: I DON'T THINK IT'S RIGHT TO JOKE ABOUT THIS.

ANNOUNCER: UH... OKAY?

SECOND ANNOUNCER: HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THERE AREN'T REALLY UFOs? ALIENS HIDING AMONG US, WAITING TO INVADE OR USE US AS FOOD OR SOMETHING?

ANNOUNCER: JERRY, COME ON. THAT'S CRAZY.
SECOND ANNOUNCER: J.

SECOND ANNOUNCER: I'M NOT CRAZY! I KNOW WHAT I SAW, DAMN IT. I KNOW THAT THING WAS IN MY HOUSE! I KNOW WHAT IT DID TO ME!

[COMMERCIAL INTERRUPTS DIALOGUE]

Jlkmcedil kljdfl Ilalkd lkd mlel lif alif mdkos dlkoa Jlkmcedil kljdfl Ilalkd lkd mlel lif alif mdkos dlkoa

alif maldij lkdlauf la idk skf l mlf alif ij laof emalif maldij lkdlauf la
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THE LAST

THE LAST
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ERRY?
GHT TO

fu iofus llijoif dkje eljeof
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l'el lif' alif mdkos dikoa
emalj' maldij lkdlauf la ldk skf l mlf alij ij laotf emalj' maldij lkdlauf la

AT THERE
WAITING



ALOGUE]

Email Program

Subject: HOLY SHIT

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: donor144

Copied To:

Send Message

Get Messages

I just saw something on CNN that is bad, BAD news. It was the footage from the peace talks in Jerusalem, the one where the shootings happened. Just before the feed cut out the camera focuses on the terrorists, and I saw a face I recognized. Anyone remember Ripsaw101? I only met him once, but he was the most fucked-up psycho I ever knew. I mean, he scared me way more than the fucking things we hunt. He was INSANE. This was like a couple of days before 9/11, and we'd taken out this bloodsucker and his nest of slaves. Burned them all up. Some of them were still alive, you know, and I thought maybe they could be saved or healed or something. But Ripsaw just torched all of them, living and dead. Fucking horrible.

Anyway, he called me on the 12th. He was out of control. Screaming about towelheads and ay-rabs and righteous fucking vengeance. I didn't think the monsters were behind the WTC, and he didn't either. He just wanted to kill somebody, _anybody_. I told him to leave me the fuck alone. I was just glad he didn't know where I lived. And that was the last I heard of him, until I saw him on CNN. He was only on the screen for a second. And the news reports, they're all saying that it was a group of gunmen that forced their way into the talks, but that it was a white male leading the attack.

Maybe he snapped and just went on some sort of killing rampage. Or maybe he discovered a monster or something among the delegates. He did have a group with him. Could it be some of us from over there? Jesus Christ, I think one of us just started World War III.

US FORCES HEAD TO QATAR

FIRESTORM RAGES IN MIDDLE EAST

Jlkmcedil kljdfj llaikd lkd mlcl lif alif mdkos Jlkmcedil kljdfj llaikd lkd mlcl lif alif mdkos dlkoa

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alif mdkosjelalddkgig
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cedil kljdfj
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Dear Rebecca,

I think this is the last letter you'll be getting from me. That's melodramatic, I guess, but it's true. By tomorrow, I'll either be heading back to Carolina or I'll be dead.

I've told you before, many letters ago, about my gifts. The dreams, the sight, all that sort of thing. The things that ruined my life, that gave me nothing to do but follow my nightmares around the country.

Well, the nightmares have stopped. But that isn't good news.

I got to Tucson about a week ago and looked around for a few days before I found any signs or codes. Eventually I made contact with this guy Emmett. He didn't know about the Red Bride, but he told me that things are heating up and getting dangerous. There were more of the monsters out there, ripping their way out of the afterlife, and they were angry. I told him about the Red Bride, and the dreams that keep showing me where she was going next. I had a vision about a museum and an arsenal of weapons. He said that was probably the National Guard base. He said a lot.

The details aren't that important, really. What matters is that we went to stop the Bride, same as I've tried to do four times before. But this time I really had her. I had the bitch cornered, away from her zombies. I looked at her, trying to keep her there. And nothing happened. She flowed right over me, cut me all over and escaped again. So I tried to help Emmett and the others, because the zombies were ripping them to pieces.

And nothing happened. Everything, all the gifts, were gone. And from the way those things were tearing into the others, whatever gifts they had were gone too. Some of us just managed to get out. We left two people behind. The useful nightmares are gone, but the other ones, the ones full of dead people's faces, they won't go away. I can't see hidden things like before. I don't get glimpses now. Even the code doesn't make sense any more. I looked at the signs I found when I got to Tucson, and I know they're supposed to mean allies or something, but they're just lines and squiggles now. Nothing's left inside me.

Emmett and his crew ditched me. Hell, they nearly shot me, thinking it was my fault, but I talked my way out. So it's just me now, with nothing but bullets and \$60.

I want to come home. I really do, even if you're not there. But I can't. I can't. Not if she's still here. Not if she's going to kill again. I have to go back to that armory tonight and try to find her.

Maybe this is just temporary. It doesn't matter. There are too many faces in my head. I can't just give up like I used to before.

God, I don't even know if you're getting these letters. I don't know if you check the mail at the house, or if you're still in Carolina. Maybe you and the new guy have gone on your honeymoon now. Doesn't matter, I guess. Same way it doesn't matter what happens tonight. What matters is the decision. To write. To fight. To believe. To hope.

I can still pretend to have hope.

Love,

Mark

US FORCES RETREAT FROM QATAR

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL ACCUSES US, QATAR OF WAR CRIMES

Jlkmcedil kljdfj llalkd lkd mlel lif alif mdkos dlkoa ldk slkf l mlf aljf ij
 la klfdlsjlkfj oijelalddkgig ldkjokeajldooidfj
 la iouis ekj Jlkmcedil

ANNOUNCER: Councilman, please, put the gun down! Put the gun down!

COUNCILMAN: "Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, and on its horns were ten diadem crowns, and on its heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast that I saw was like a leopard, but its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. The dragon gave the beast his power, his throne, and great authority to rule."

Don't you dare stop broadcasting, damn it!

ANNOUNCER: For God's sake!

COUNCILMAN: That's right! For God's sake! "One of the beast's heads appeared to have been killed, but the lethal wound had been healed. And the whole world followed the beast in amazement; they worshiped the dragon because he had given ruling authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast too, saying: 'Who is like the beast?' and 'Who is able to make war against him?'"

VOICE: Police! Drop the gun!
 (sound of gunshots)

MOB TORCHES DETROIT OFFICE BUILDING

"INHABITED BY MONSTERS" CLAIMS RINGLEADER

Jlkmcedil kljdfj llalkd lkd mlel lif alif Jlkmcedil kljdfj llalkd lkd mlel lif
 mdkos dlkoa ldk slkf l mlf aljf ij laof mdkos dlkoa ldk slkf l mlf aljf ij
 emaljf maldij lkdlauf la klfdlsjlkfj oijelald- emaljf maldij lkdlauf la klfdlsjlkfj
 dkgig ldkjokeajldooidfj alkjsolejeo fu iofuls dkoio ldkjokeajldooidfj alkjsole

CK: I KNOW THINGS ARE A LITTLE CRAZY OUT THERE, FOLKS, WHAT WITH THE THWARTED TERRORIST ATTACK ON THE TOKYO STOCK EXCHANGE AND ALL THIS TALK OF "CLOSE-CALL" METEORS. BUT AS THEY SAY, THE SHOW MUST GO ON. ON THE LINE IS HECTOR YUAN, A CHEF FROM THE FRENCH QUARTER OF NEW ORLEANS. HE'S GOING TO TELL US—

BW: THIS ISN'T HECTOR. IT'S BOOKWORM.

CK: BOOKWORM? WHAT HAPPENED TO MR. YUAN?

BW: HE NEVER AGREED TO DO THE SHOW. I DID. DO YOU REMEMBER ME?

CK: YES, OF COURSE, BUT THIS IS A LITTLE UNUSUAL—

BW: IT'S HAPPENING. THE END. IT'S ALL OVER WITH. I NEED TO TALK TO THE PEOPLE.

CK: AND WHAT DO YOU NEED TO TELL THEM?

BW: THEY SAY THE END IS COMING. IT IS, BUT WHAT IF WE CAN STOP IT FROM REALLY BEING THE FINAL, GAME-OVER END? WE CAN FORTIFY OURSELVES. WE CAN BE GOOD PEOPLE. LED BY EXAMPLE. MONSTERS FLOURISH LIKE GERMS. IF WE KEEP A GOOD, CLEAN ENVIRONMENT, THEY CAN'T PROSPER. WE'VE LET THEM GO TOO LONG, AND NOW THE CONSPIRACY IS ENTRENCHED. BUT WE CAN STOP IT! SOCIETY CAN STILL HEAL. THESE DON'T NEED TO BE OUR LAST DAYS. THE TUNNEL IS GOING TO BE LONG AND DARK, BUT WE CAN MAKE IT TO THE OTHER SIDE. WE CAN FIND THE VIRTUE TO STOP THE MONST—

CK: STOP THE WHAT? (PAUSE) LOOKS LIKE WE LOST HIM AGAIN, FOLKS.

Email Program

Subject: The more things change

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: ticket312

Copied To:

Send Message

Get Messages

What I don't understand is how people are pretending that nothing is happening.

There's footage of the walking dead on the news and people go on as usual. Three wolf creatures tore through a mall in Brazil last week, in broad daylight, killing dozens of people, and the whole thing is caught on film. But even after the public sees it, no one says, "Monsters are real." There are riots breaking out everywhere, but most people just go on as if it'll all blow over.

What will it take before the world acknowledges what we've known for so long? What has to happen before humanity acts?

ANOTHER MASSIVE EARTHQUAKE ROCKS LOS ANGELES Resurgence of Religious Hysteria in Aftermath

One minute the LA skyline was normal. Then it was just there. This massive goddamn black shape. Like a church, a Gothic cathedral, but enormous. More than enormous. I think it was at least a mile wide, more than a hundred stories tall. At first I thought it was a vision or a waking dream, something thrown at me by the Messengers. Then I heard plates fall to the floor beside me. I looked around, and the waitress at the café was just staring. She could see it too. A few seconds later, the panic started.

"Truth Crusade" Moves Toward Washington President Threatens to Deploy National Guard

SCIENTISTS BAFFLED BY UNEXPECTED ECLIPSE

RIOTS ACROSS AMERICA

Jlkmcedil kljdfj llalkd lkd mlal lif alif mlkos dlkoo Jlkmcedil kljdfj llalkd lkd mlal lif alif mlkos dlkoo
ldk slkf l mlf aljf ij lao
kjfdlsjlkfj oijelalddkgig
fu iofuls lljioif dkje elje
Jlkmcedil kljdfj llalkd lkd
ldk slkf l mlf aljf ij laoi



Email Program

Subject:

To:

From:

Copied To:

 Send Message  Get Messages

Anyone else getting a _lot_ of messages recently? I used to read emails from some of you about getting 'regular updates.' I never heard shit after the first time. But now I'm hearing voices every four or five days, telling me to 'kill this and 'punish that.' It's getting to me. And then there's the sight. It's honestly getting hard to turn it _off_. Not turn it on. Like someone's reaching into my head and flicking the switch every time I step out the door. And I'm doing new tricks with no god damn warning. I can feel something almost like energy straining to get out. I can't sleep anymore. I keep a little 'freedom' symbol on my desk at work, just in case. No one's ever noticed it before. But now nearly everyone in the office — those that are still coming to work — has asked me what it means. These are just ordinary people, as far as I can tell. They can't read it, but they know it means _something_. I'm so scared. I'm afraid the new world that people like Memphis68 talk about is here, and I'm not ready for it.

But I have a light.
The fire is coming for us all.

NATION ON HIGH ALERT

TEOR HITS MUMBAI

MILLIONS DEAD IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

This is from the Book of Revelations:
8:10 Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a huge star burning like a torch fell from the sky; it landed on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.
8:11 (Now the name of the star is Wormwood.) So a third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from these waters because they had turned bitter.
This “meteor” that hit India? I’m terrified.

In the Press

PRESIDENT CALLS FOR NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER
Drought Ravages California, Nevada, Arizona

Leaf died at 1:15 this afternoon. I watched her close her eyes for the last time, and when they opened again, it was the demon that saw through them. It tried to rise from the bed, but was held down by the restraints. I believe my presence came as a surprise to the being, as did its inability to move.

'You,' it said in Leaf's voice, which affected me more than I expected. 'I know you. She knew you. Van Wgk, the doctor.'

'That is correct,' I replied. 'And you are Vassago. Tell me, is there anything left of Leaf?'

It snarled at me and attempted to break free again. It was weakened by the drugs I had been giving Leaf, just as we had hoped.

'Your precious bitch is dead,' it said. 'And you're next! She sold me her soul and I devoured it. There was nothing left of her even before I arrived. That was what I had hoped to hear. Because that meant the demon was wrong.'

'Now what have you done to me?' it screamed.

'Nothing too severe,' I answered. 'The drugs in your system are not overly dangerous. You'll be weak and disoriented for several hours, but you'll live.'

'Allowing you to kill your girlfriend before I take control? That's sweet, and so fucking stupid. It doesn't matter if you kill this meat. I can always find more.'

I began packing away the equipment I had used to monitor Leaf's condition during her final days. After they called me back from Turkey and begged me to help her, 'I have no intention of killing Leaf, or you,' I said. 'Believe me, I have considered it. But it was Leaf who persuaded me to let you live, to allow you to possess her.'

'What do you mean, "allowed me"? I hollowed the bitch out and took her. You washed up junkie abortionist! You fucked up again, Van Wgk!'

'No,' I told it. 'You did. You felt Leaf's resistance wash away and thought that she'd been destroyed. But she let you in. Willingly. She believed you could be saved.'

'Saved from what?'

'Yourself.'

It realized what had been done to it then, and it screamed so long and hard that flecks of blood sprayed from Leaf's mouth.

I rose to my feet. 'Your name is Leaf Pankowski now. You believe in redemption, no matter how debased or corrupt a person or demon might be. You believe that a human soul can be such a force for redemption that its mere existence can cure a creature of pure evil. You were willing to send yourself into brain death to lure a demon into your soul and force it to become something better than it was.'

'Goodbye, Vassago. I hope you enjoy being human,' I said. And then I left.

NUCLEAR WEAPON DETONATES IN WEST BANK

Gregg Karpman
Enterprise correspondent
The fight to bring more high-technology to the West Bank is not just a matter of economic development. We're trying to change that.



Email Program

Subject: Fuck this, I'm outta here

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: everready311

Copied To:

Send Message

Get Messages

What the fuck is wrong with you people? Why are you still filling up my inbox with hunting and studying and monsters when THE WHOLE FUCKING WORLD IS FALLING APART? It's over. We lost. Time to cut your losses and head for the hills, not try to think up new ways to throw your lives away fighting wars that don't matter anymore. Screw you losers. If you want to tilt at windmills, be my fucking guest. Me, I'm finding a car and getting the fuck out of Dodge like a sane person.

Dear Kelly,

I hope this letter gets to you. I don't know if it will. There are no postmen any more, same way there are no garbage men or bus drivers or cops. There are firemen, but they only protect the monsters. That's okay, since we're the ones setting some of the fires.

But yeah, I don't know if this is going to get to you. I'm going to give it to Ricky Tang. He's got a motorbike and he says he can get to our old apartment, past the blockades. I hope he's right. He's a good guy and I'd hate to see them catch him.

I want you to come here, to Henry Horner Homes. This is the only place in Chicago, maybe the world, that's even halfway safe now. It's because we have Lupe protecting us.

I mean, we don't have any electricity, except when Doctor Cole's generator works. And there's no running water, but we've got the river and a good filtration system going. There's food. We grow vegetables on the rooftops, and we're never going to run out of canned meat and processed cheese.

We keep getting bigger. Bit by bit, block by block. We keep claiming ground because of Lupe. She never stops fighting for us, never stops finding ways to keep out the monsters, freaks and killers. And her soldiers too, the ones she's trained to find the hideouts. They're taught to kill the monsters and stop them taking our homes.

The rest of the city, I know it's bad. I see the fires. I smell the blood and hear the screaming. We still get hurt. We still lose people. We aren't invulnerable. But we're still here. I think as long as Lupe is with us we can make it.

I hope you get this letter. I hope you make it here soon.

Love,

Maria


Email Program


Subject:

To:

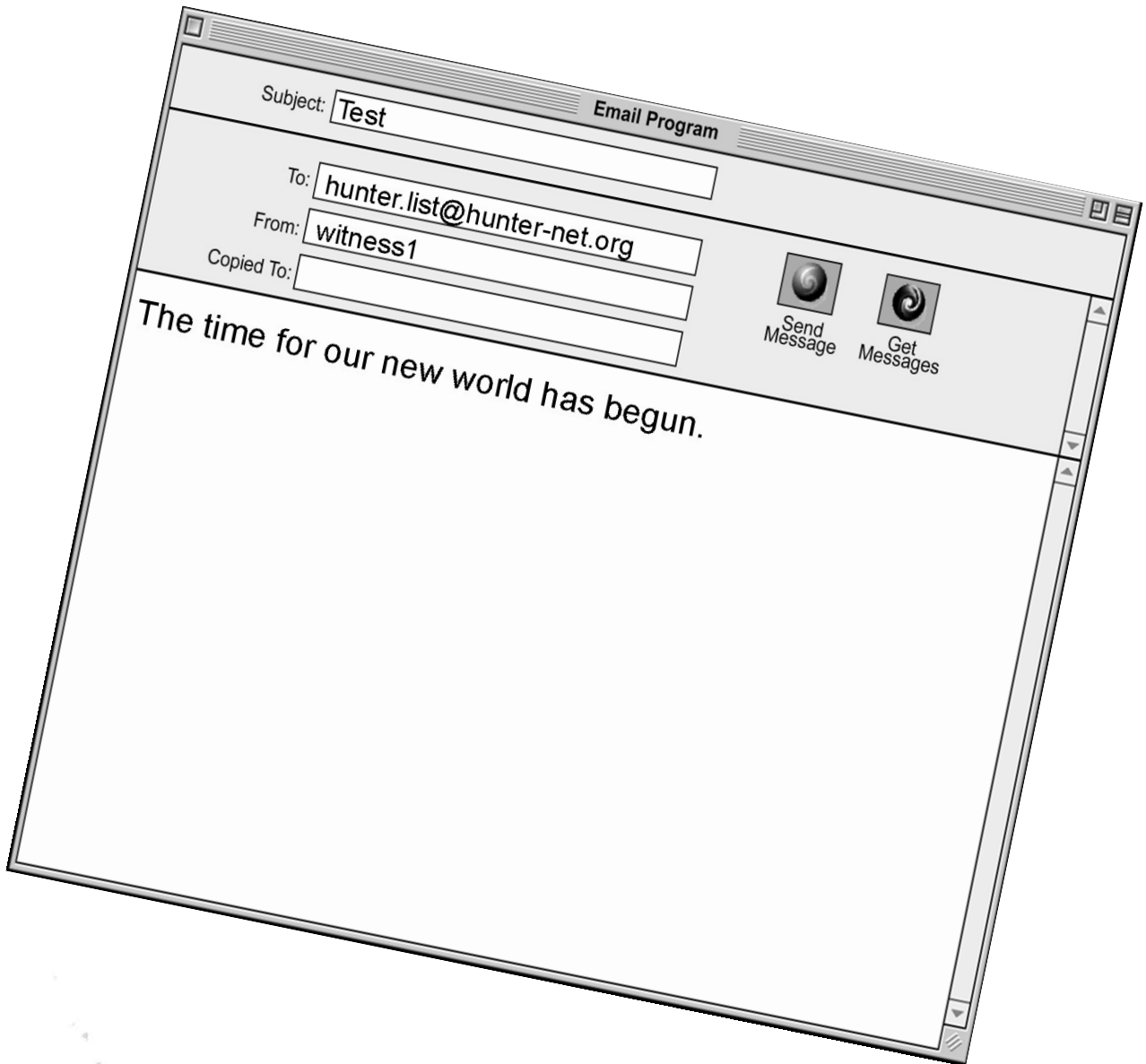
From:

Copied To:

 Send Message

 Get Messages

February 15th, midnight, from a hilltop a few miles outside San Diego
The city is on fire. Even from here, I can smell the smoke, feel little hot flecks of ash in the air. And I can hear the screaming. Not the screams of the dying and injured, but the screams of the single, giant thing that's burning. I've been sitting here for two hours, gun ready, and the thing hasn't stopped screaming.
It's over. The world. Civilization has burned to ashes in the wind. Not just here, I know. Occasional bits of news make it to the airwaves sometimes, pirate broadcasts I suppose. Across America, across the world, it's all blood and fire and madness. Monsters walk the streets openly now and nothing can stop them. Show's over.
I escaped from San Diego before the fire started, when the riots and hysteria were raging. I'm writing this on a laptop I looted from a store. I never would have done that before, but all the laws, the rules, they're all meaningless now. It's anarchy. Worse. I thought about that when I stole a car and drove out of the city, the fires erupting behind me, the scream just starting to roar.
So I decided to kill myself. What's the point of living when everything is gone? I escaped San Diego out of reflex, but where do I go from here? Everything I cared for, everything we fought for has been destroyed. We've lost. The darkness has won. What's the point of waiting for the firing squad?
I could have just driven the car off a cliff or something, but old habits die hard. Instead I drove here, parked and watched San Diego die, waiting for just the right moment to pull the trigger. Maybe I'm waiting for a reason not to do it, a sign that there's anything left of the world I used to know.
No sign has come. I think that's what made me change my mind.
I think all of us who fought to keep things the way they were, to save civilization from the monsters and darkness. But maybe that wasn't the point, because civilization was where the monsters and the darkness came from. What we fought to protect was the same thing the creatures wanted to control.
Now it's gone. The monsters have been dragged into the light and they have to play by the same rules as the rest of us. This isn't just our reckoning. It's theirs. We're going from a corrupt and flawed world to something new. It doesn't have to be worse than this. It can't be worse than this. Not if we're there, on the ground, helping it take shape.
I drove past a broken-down truck on the way up this hill. A man and a woman were walking away from it. I'll save this email to send later, if hunter-net still exists. If the Internet still exists. I'm going to drive back down and find those two.
Soldier out.



THE FATE OF THE WORLD

The hunt is over.

No more little battles. No more secret wars. The final days are upon the imbued, and the rules have changed forever — or, at least, until the end of the world, which may be sooner than anyone expected. But as the fires of Armageddon rise and the secret masters of the world prepare to bring it all to a close, there's still room for normal men and women to make a difference, to draw a line and hold fast against the darkness.

This world is ending. But the imbued are the ones who will determine how the next world, if any, will begin.

The following scenarios are presented for Storytellers who wish to end their chronicles with a bang, ringing down the changes, ushering in the last days — and putting the imbued at center stage for one last, all-important story. These scenarios are outlines, not detailed instructions, and need to be fleshed out and modified to suit your chronicle and characters.

All of these scenarios are developed in a similar fashion. An overview sums up the direction of events. Situations with which hunters must deal are then developed into a framework upon which Storytellers can expand. Each scenario focuses on a specific Virtue —

ENDING ALL THE STORIES

With a chronicle's end comes the end of *all* the individual stories of the imbued. Storytellers should not neglect the small, personal stories of players' characters — the son estranged from his mother, the businessman whose company was taken over by demonic thralls, the former junkie trying to rescue his lover from a blood cult.

These stories can easily be swept aside and forgotten in the chaos of the final days, but that would be a shame. Now more than ever, these “little” events are important to characters. These personal matters are last chances for revenge, forgiveness or simply closure before everything burns away.

Storytellers should look for opportunities to include characters' personal stories, plot hooks and unresolved issues in the finale of the chronicle. These stories don't have to end happily or cleanly. There are bound to be tragic, terrible conclusions to some. Say, a lover killed by monsters out of spite. Others may end well, even in the chaos and horror of the last of days. A distant child may forgive his mother in the face of Armageddon. If the hunters are to face the threat of eternal night and march toward an uncertain tomorrow, it's best if lingering matters are resolved so they don't hold anyone back. Best for the characters, best for the players, and best for your final story.

Zeal, Mercy or Vision — and the demands made of that Virtue's adherents in the end times. But each plot also provides details on what hunters of other Virtues can accomplish. Finally, there are notes on how a scenario might end, and what characters' success or failure may mean for humanity.

CLEANSING FIRES

Overview: As civilization crumbles into anarchy, supernatural creatures operate openly, claiming victims and running death camps to house their prey. The old order is gone, and with it the need for restraint. Now is the time to rise up and take the bastards down, cleansing the city — and perhaps the world — of evil.

“Cleansing Fires” is a scenario that emphasizes the Zeal Virtue. In the final days, the monsters and supernatural creatures grow desperate, throwing away their disguises and political power struggles. Now they fight for survival any way they can. The characters have a chance to throw the monsters down and destroy them, clearing their city of the supernatural so that predation and horror finally cease. Negotiation and redemption are no longer priorities — it's all-out war. This is a straightforward, fairly linear story, one of warfare. Complexity doesn't derive from events. It arises from the personalities and actions of the hunters themselves, and from the choices they make.

THINGS FALL APART

Society has collapsed. The corruption of the supernatural, hidden under the skin of civilization for so long, has finally burst forth and infected reality. Undead hordes rampage through the streets, killing and destroying in mindless rage. Vampires wage war with each other for supply of precious blood and slaves. Witches throw off their guise of normality and attempt to win over armies of acolytes in their quest for ultimate power. Monsters and nightmares rip cities apart and murder thousands, even millions, in pursuit of incomprehensible horror. The truth is revealed, showing the sick and impossible face behind the lies.

Government, business and society crumble with the revelation of the supernatural. Riots and mass suicides are just the start. What really causes society's downfall is the disintegration of its support structure as hysterical and angry citizens stop obeying the rules and believing in the law. Like a nation that's lost a war, society lies in ruins, and formerly happy and affluent citizens scramble for basic survival.

Across America — across the world — the situation is the same. Governments still control weapons and armies, police and firemen, but now they are openly in the service of dark powers. The media, if it still exists, broadcasts nothing but propaganda. But since few cities have electricity, few can hear the lies anyway. Money means nothing, prestige means nothing.



ing, hope means nothing. All that matters is food, shelter, weapons and endurance.

Hunters are not protected from civilization's destruction. They may even *contribute* to it by exposing the secrets of the supernatural. Their jobs are gone, their homes destroyed, their families starving. All that they had sought to protect has been washed away in a sea of chaos and blood. Storytellers may wish to spend several chapters simply dealing with matters of mundane survival, testing the mettle of the imbued in a world in which the certainties and protection of modern life has disintegrated.

A CALL TO ARMS

As the imbued attempt to survive and protect themselves and their loved ones, a bigger picture emerges. Monsters are in the open now, preying upon surviving humans. If the hunters want to make a real difference, they have to take their fight home. The Storyteller can use any of the following hooks to get the scenario started.

- A character's friend, family member or ally is captured by a monster, becoming a shapechanger's brood mare or a demon's worshipper. In rescuing the friend, the hunters see that the creature dispenses with secrecy and seeks to rule the ruined city with an iron fist. The only way to fight back effectively against the creature (and the other horrors overtaking the city) is to use the same tactics.

- Another hunter asks the characters for assistance in fighting back against monsters, or gives them information

about the way the horrors now operate. (The email from Dictatrix 12 earlier in this chapter is a good example.) The needy hunter is convinced that the rules have changed; it's time to fight the darkness publicly. The characters must be careful, however, that their ally's information isn't slanted toward her *own* agenda.

- Hunters of the Zeal creeds or with a high Zeal rating receive a vision, in which the city is razed to the ground. From the rubble erupts a geyser of blood, from which leap hideous, shadowy forms. Out of the wreckage emerge human forms, wreathed in flames and wielding weapons of light, to do battle. Many of the human forms are destroyed, but the shadows are wiped out. In the aftermath, the flaming warriors lead a stream of refugees to the outside world. Along with the vision comes a message: "STAND AGAINST THE DARKNESS," "WIPE THE CORRUPTION FROM THE WORLD," or "CLEANSE THE EARTH THAT IS TO COME."

It's time for the last and final battle with the forces of darkness. And this time, the imbued have an advantage they didn't enjoy before. All the impediments to the hunt that civilization once posed are gone. No police to avoid. No skepticism to overcome. No need for secrecy. This is open warfare, not a covert operation. The characters are free to break the rules with impunity.

Of course, so are their opponents.

CHOOSE YOUR TARGETS

Just what kind of opposition the hunters face in this war depends on the events of your chronicle to date. As Storyteller, you've already developed a picture of what creatures and forces exist in the characters' home city, forces they may have contended with frequently in the past. New creatures and dangers may appear to take advantage of the chaos, and some established horrors could fall in the first days of anarchy. But for the most part, the creatures arrayed against the hunters now are those that have dominated the chronicle to date. What changes is the methods and openness of these creatures, who can now commit atrocities without the need for secrecy.

The biggest thing that's likely to change is the creation of *territories* — districts openly controlled by a monster or group of monsters, where any human survivors are enslaved or murdered. Almost all the creatures of the World of Darkness need humans for some reason — food, energy or simply for the gratification of desires. Similarly, creatures crave power and influence, perhaps in hopes of saving themselves, or because ruling a pocket kingdom or tattered empire satisfies their obsession with dominance.

The following creatures all have reasons for taking territories throughout the city. Other beings may also try to stake out turf for their own reasons — or may simply rampage through the city, killing and destroying anything in their path.

Ghosts/Walking Dead: The spirits of the dead draw strength from human emotion, especially negative emotion. Ghosts may assemble cults of followers, possessing hosts temporarily and drinking the pain and misery of their slaves. Walking dead are inclined to simple destruction and the terror their victims feel. The territories of these beings are probably the most disorganized and chaotic of all, and are focused on graveyards, cemeteries and disaster sites.

Vampires: The bloodsuckers may now act openly, without fear of discovery, but they must also compete with their own kind for precious blood. Competition between vampire warlords is likely to be fierce, and territories are patrolled by well-armed ghouls and slaves. Some vampires set up "blood camps," prisons for survivors and mortals. These camps, established in defensible locations such as hospitals and jails, are packed with mortals that are (comparatively) well fed and protected — until undead commandants come to claim more victims.

Shapechangers: Were-creatures draw power from nature rather than from humans, and set up territories in parks and wild spaces with their sacred places at the center. Shapechangers do need humans for one reason, though — as breeding stock, the mothers and fathers of a new generation of monsters. While were-creatures are unlikely to try and expand their territories, they aggressively raid human refuges for new breeding captives or simply for prey.

Warlocks: Manipulators and wizards lose many of their advantages, influence and purpose with the fall of the civilization that concealed them. But now they can practice their magic freely, unfettered by the collective disbelief of human civilization. In these horrific end times, people realize that *anything* is possible. Warlocks left in the city attempt to gather acolytes who can assist in magic rituals and protect their masters from danger. Witches may also gather legions of followers with promises and bribes, but aren't likely to be aggressive or expansionist against one another, unless a warlock sends out raiding parties to steal food, supplies or artifacts needed for his magic.

Demons: Demons gather armies of followers. The damned need mortal faith and can win worshippers with promises of salvation or power. If there are demons in the city they may be the most dangerous opponents hunters face, because they can lure away humans who might otherwise support the efforts of the imbued, and because they aggressively address rivals' followers and resources. Hunters who fight demons risk hurting or killing mortal followers whose only crime is the need for something to believe in when all else seems lost.

An Army of Darkness: For most chronicles, a city isn't home to just one kind of monster, but many different ones that all prey upon and enslave human survivors. Different creatures establish different bases, territories and agendas, and may war with each other. Or they may ally in order to destroy hunters and their growing support networks, or to put down rival monster groups. Playing one sect of monsters against another can be an important strategy for the imbued.

BLOCK BY BLOCK

Once the characters have identified their enemies, the task is simple. Simple, but not easy. Taking back the city is a matter of strategy, supply lines and zones of control — reclaiming locations that monsters control and destroying their power bases. This, of course, is easier said than done. The hunters are guerillas taking on an invading army, or invaders themselves. They need every weapon they possess to reclaim their home.

Taking a territory involves more than just guns and fight scenes. The creatures controlling and patrolling these kingdoms have a great deal to lose, and they guard themselves with defenses, soldiers and mortal hostages. The three Zeal creeds have different roles to play in this war, and an effective campaign against the darkness demands that hunters do what they do best.

Of course, skill and personality have at *least* as big a role here as a hunter's creed. A Martyr might possess tactical skills and an insightful mind, and play the part of a leader in the war. An Innocent may care so much for the refugees in her care that she does anything to protect them, fighting attackers in the manner of a Defender.

The creeds have natural *ability* in some areas, thanks to their Virtues and edges, but that doesn't override the identity of a person or make a hunter "wrong" for the role he assumes.

Avengers: These hunters are the frontline soldiers of the war, the first in and the last out. With their offensive, combat-focused edges, Avengers are those best suited to one-on-one combat with the supernatural and its minions. Before that point is reached, however, Avengers need to focus on gaining access to an enemy's territory, scouting out possible avenues of entry (and escape), and on slowly wearing down monsters' followers and defenses. These are the most hazardous roles a hunter can play in this scenario, and an Avenger who is careless or lacks dedication will soon be killed. Avengers who want to survive must explore their anger, that need for vengeance, burning away their human weaknesses — and running the risk of losing their humanity in the process. The war will bring many opportunities for these hunters to gain Conviction and increase their Virtues. Madness may be an inevitable side effect of victory.

Defenders: While Avengers are charged with destroying the enemy, Defenders have an equally important task: protecting the home front. The protectors of the war, Defenders must safeguard hunters' own territory from attack and reprisal. That role places them in constant danger — and may drive them to madness before the war is done, too. Defenders are also invaluable in rescuing people who have been captured or enslaved. Rescuing the downtrodden is a challenging obligation, involving anything from silently leading chains of refugees through the sewers to ramming barricades with trucks and pulling hostages out through a hail of gunfire. And once refugees are safe, Defenders must continue to protect them so that former captors (or other creatures) cannot take advantage again.

Judges: If Avengers are soldiers and Defenders are guardians, Judges are officers and leaders, the tactical planners and decision-makers of the war. It falls to Judges to decide how to conduct attacks, what defenses and resources to target, and how to weaken the enemy before the final confrontation. This role demands data and intelligence. Judges need to endanger themselves to ferret out enemies' secrets. Judges may also decide how a group's resources are best used and maintained, and must consider how to keep the imbued supplied and protected. Judges aren't as prevalent on the front lines as are Avengers or even Defenders, but their role is demanding nonetheless. As the commanding officers of the war, Judges are called upon to make the hard choices — who undertakes missions, who gets rescued, who gets left behind, who lives and who dies. It's a role that can take a heavy toll on a hunter's morale and sanity. Judges may be pushed to the edge and beyond by the burden of their responsibilities.

THE OTHER CREEDS

"Cleansing Fires" emphasizes the role and purpose of the Zeal Virtue, to wipe away the infection of the supernatural from this world and prevent it from corrupting anything that rises anew. But the other creeds and Virtues have a part to play in this war. There are many opportunities for non-Zealot characters to get involved in this scenario.

The Merciful: These hunters focus on aiding the war effort through intelligence, diplomacy and providing hope when all seems lost. Innocents can gather information through scouting raids, and may be able negotiate with one enemy to fight another. Martyrs could rally hunters and ordinary people alike, filling hearts with hope through courage and sacrifice. Redeemers may tend to the wounded and persuade enemies to surrender or withdraw with the promise of forgiveness or salvation.

The Visionary: War is more than fighting, it's information. It's *purpose*, and that's what these hunters provide. Hermits can hang back and gather insights with their edges, providing the data needed to draw up battle plans. Visionaries may develop long-term strategies, coordinating their fellows and making sure each battle is a step toward winning the war. And Waywards could inspire and direct from the front lines, demonstrating savage power (although the price of that effectiveness could be ordinary people, their lives used as bait or weapons).

WAR STORIES

As the scenario progresses, the characters might make headway against the monsters, retaking territory and casting down their dark masters. But a story that's simply raid after raid is both boring *and* unrealistic. The following are suggestions for developments and events to keep the story moving, issues with which hunters must deal on the way to the final chapter, the final battle with the darkness.

Supply Lines: To continue the battle, the imbued need constant aid and supplies: weapons, medicine, equipment and simple food and shelter. These resources must be found or created; searching for them can take up all the "spare" time a hunter might have. And once these necessities are found, they must be protected lest the enemy — or other humans — steal them for their own use.

The Home Front: Casting an undead tyrant down is just the beginning of the job. An enemy's territory can't be left empty — it's a resource that must be used by the imbued or else be claimed by a different enemy. Once a territory is taken, it may need to be populated with refugees and survivors, the human supporters and aides of the imbued. Resources must be found to feed, clothe and

shelter these people, fresh water and sanitation must be provided, and borders must be protected from invasion.

New Faces: As one enemy is cast down, another may take its place. New monsters could enter the city looking for a chance to grab power, while others (such as the walking dead) may simply be *created* in the wake of a battle. At the same time, potential new allies may appear — imbued outsiders come to fight for the characters' cause, or courageous refugees prepared to go against the enemy. But even these allies can pose problems as precious resources are stretched ever thinner to provide for them. And do other hunters *really* have the same goals as the characters?

Black Allegiances: Faced with attack from the imbued, supernatural beings may band together to fight back. While these creatures may hate each other and compete for followers and resources, they fear or hate the characters more. Besieged enemies may attempt to turn the tables, launching attacks on hunter territories, or bringing in allies of their own to bolster forces for a decisive strike.

WAR'S END

The purpose of this scenario is simple: Take back the city and cast out or destroy supernatural evil. War is never a simple affair, however. The imbued are likely to suffer terrible casualties, even if they gain the upper hand. Success demands sacrifice and brings with it new complications and obstacles. Ultimately, it comes down to a single bid — a last stand, a final battle against the darkness.

No matter how the war has been fought thus far, this is the hardest battle of all. The final enemy (whoever that might be) has had the opportunity to conserve its resources, to prepare and plan for this, its last stand. The characters, on the other hand, may have fought battle after battle in their campaign and are bound to have paid a heavy price in sanity and lives.

As Storyteller, you need to make this battle *matter*. It's time to pull out all the stops and show the hunters — the players' characters — the fight of their lives. The enemy fights dirty, fights desperately, and the imbued must do the same if they have a hope of winning. This is the final battle of a war story, and not everyone can make it out alive. In fact, *all* of the characters might die. That's not necessarily a bad thing. Tragic endings are all too possible in **Hunter**. Even if all the imbued die, the battle may not be lost. Not if the refugees and survivors they have cared for rise up and fight in memory of their protectors.

When the dust settles and the last of the dead have been carted from the battlefield, what then? Do the Messengers appear in a burst of light and say "well done" to the survivors? Probably not. What's more likely is that nothing happens at all. The city is cleansed. If other imbued elsewhere have successfully waged similar campaigns, the country may be free of supernatural contamination. The hunters have the remains of a

society under them, a nation of survivors who seek leaders. The characters can protect that realm and work to stop the darkness from returning.

Even if the imbued win their battle, the war isn't necessarily over. Who knows what's happening across the rest of the world? Perhaps the end is inevitable; nothing can hold it back. The hunters may have liberated their city only to have it be destroyed by an unstoppable Armageddon. Or perhaps the city is an island of weak and fading light in a sea of darkness and corruption. And, of course, there's the chance that the characters fall in battle and the city is not claimed from monsters.

You decide what happens after the battle. The imbued have done all that they can; all that a band of fragile and fallible humans can achieve in the final days. What happens after that may be out of their hands. All they can hope is that their blood, sweat and tears have wiped the sins from one world and consecrated a new, pure one.

GLIMMER OF HOPE

Overview: As the world burns, a miracle happens. A power is unleashed that can heal monsters of their corruption, returning them to a normal human state. The imbued become the custodians of this power as supernatural creatures flock to their city to be saved, or the characters may seek to destroy this new and awesome power.

"Glimmer of Hope" emphasizes the Mercy Virtue. The coming Armageddon shatters the normal boundaries of reality. Events that were once impossible now come to pass. The possibility of healing or pardoning monsters is a reality, and the characters control that power. But this gift can't be used on a whim. It's a dwindling resource that must be guarded and protected. To the characters fall the responsibility of deciding which monsters may be saved and which must be turned aside — where mercy can be offered out and where it must be withheld. The story focuses on interaction between hunters and inhuman beings, on hard choices and heavy responsibilities.

MIRACLE IN THE AFTERMATH

In the terror of the final days, it's more than just human civilization that falls apart. The wall between the possible and impossible crumbles, as does the barrier between the worlds of the living and dead. *Anything* can happen, and a miracle occurs in the characters' city: The *glimmer* — a power that can remove the taint of corruption from a supernatural creature. Under the glimmer's light, a monster is cleansed of darkness, forgiven its sins and returned to humanity or allowed to pass into peaceful oblivion.

"Glimmer" is just a convenient shorthand for describing the power of this scenario. You can call it anything you like, or not call it anything at all. Just what form the glimmer takes is for you to decide based on the needs of your chronicle. Here are a few suggestions.

- An extremist Merciful hunter develops the power to heal monsters as a level-five edge. This may be one of the players' characters or a Storyteller character. You should design an edge to encompass the effect, using the powers in other **Hunter** sourcebooks as guidelines. Expiate from **Hunter Book: Redeemer** (p. 77) is a possible model, only the power at work here could be more lasting. This edge may come from deep inside the possessor or from an external source (see **Hunter: Fall from Grace** for more details). The power *seems* benevolent, but it could be a gift from a corrupt or evil source that uses the imbued to weaken the supernatural opposition.

- An extremist Redeemer battles a powerful creature, perhaps a demon, warlock or other being with knowledge of spirit worlds. Both fall, and in their death throes a fountain of light erupts, birthed from their spiritual power. This version of the glimmer is a stationary field of mystic light. It emits a kind of spiritual gravity that draws supernatural corruption to itself. It might be tall enough to reach into the sky like a skyscraper or small enough to illuminate a room.

- A scientist or technically minded hunter discovers a "cure" for supernatural corruption, a serum made from unusual ingredients. The treatment shouldn't work, but somehow — in a world where the laws of physics and life fray — it does, purging even dead flesh of supernatural toxins. The cure cannot be made easily, however. Perhaps it's based on chemicals found on a site of mystic activity, or only the inventor can make it work and she isn't sure how.

No matter what the glimmer is in your chronicle, your hunters are the ones who learn of its existence. Perhaps the possessor of the power comes to them for help, or a vision from the Messengers drives them to the discovery. Maybe they're the ones to create this miracle in the first place. In any case, the characters are the first to find out about the glimmer. The first, but not the last.

HEALING LIGHT

Whatever form the glimmer takes in your chronicle, it possesses the same properties — qualities that shape the course of the scenario. (You may, of course, decide to change these features to better suit the story you want to tell.)

It turns monsters into normal humans. Exposure to the glimmer eradicates any supernatural properties of a being. (Depending on the form the glimmer takes, some creatures might be immune. It's hard to inject a ghost with a serum, for example.) Vampires, warlocks, shapechangers and other "altered humans" become normal people with no supernatural powers of any kind. Ghosts and the walking dead simply die, their souls going on to some kind of final reward. Demons, nightmares and other "possessors" are expelled from their hosts (and pass into oblivion like ghosts), or merge permanently with their hosts to become normal humans.

It has no effect on the imbued. Hunters are completely unaffected by the glimmer, in either a positive or negative way. If a physical effect like a serum, it has no toxic or beneficial result when administered. If a spiritual phenomenon like a column of healing light, it is not affected by edges and appears no different to second sight than to normal senses. Even if the glimmer has an effect on normal people, hunters are immune. They are the custodians of this power, not the recipients, and they get no benefit from it.

It is a limited resource. The glimmer cannot simply be used to cure every monster in the world. Every time the power is applied, its strength is diminished. The serum cannot be remade. The light fades. The possessing hunter's vitality and sanity erodes. Only a select number of monsters can benefit from the glimmer, and it falls to the characters to decide which creatures should be saved. Most of the drama in "Glimmer of Hope" comes from the weight of responsibility, in deciding which monsters will be saved and which will remain damned.

It attracts monsters. Somehow, the supernatural creatures of the world become aware of the glimmer's existence. This might be by mundane means, such as rumors of its power spreading through vampire or demon circles. The glimmer might send out a spiritual signal of sorts just by existing; monsters become instinctively aware of its properties. In any case, creatures soon learn of the glimmer and come to the city to take advantage of its power.

Thanks to all of these glimmer qualities, the characters are in control of immense power. But they can't simply use it for their own advantage or as they please. They must decide which monsters are deserving. And they can't simply hide it and not use it, because monsters come to them demanding to be healed (or to destroy it).

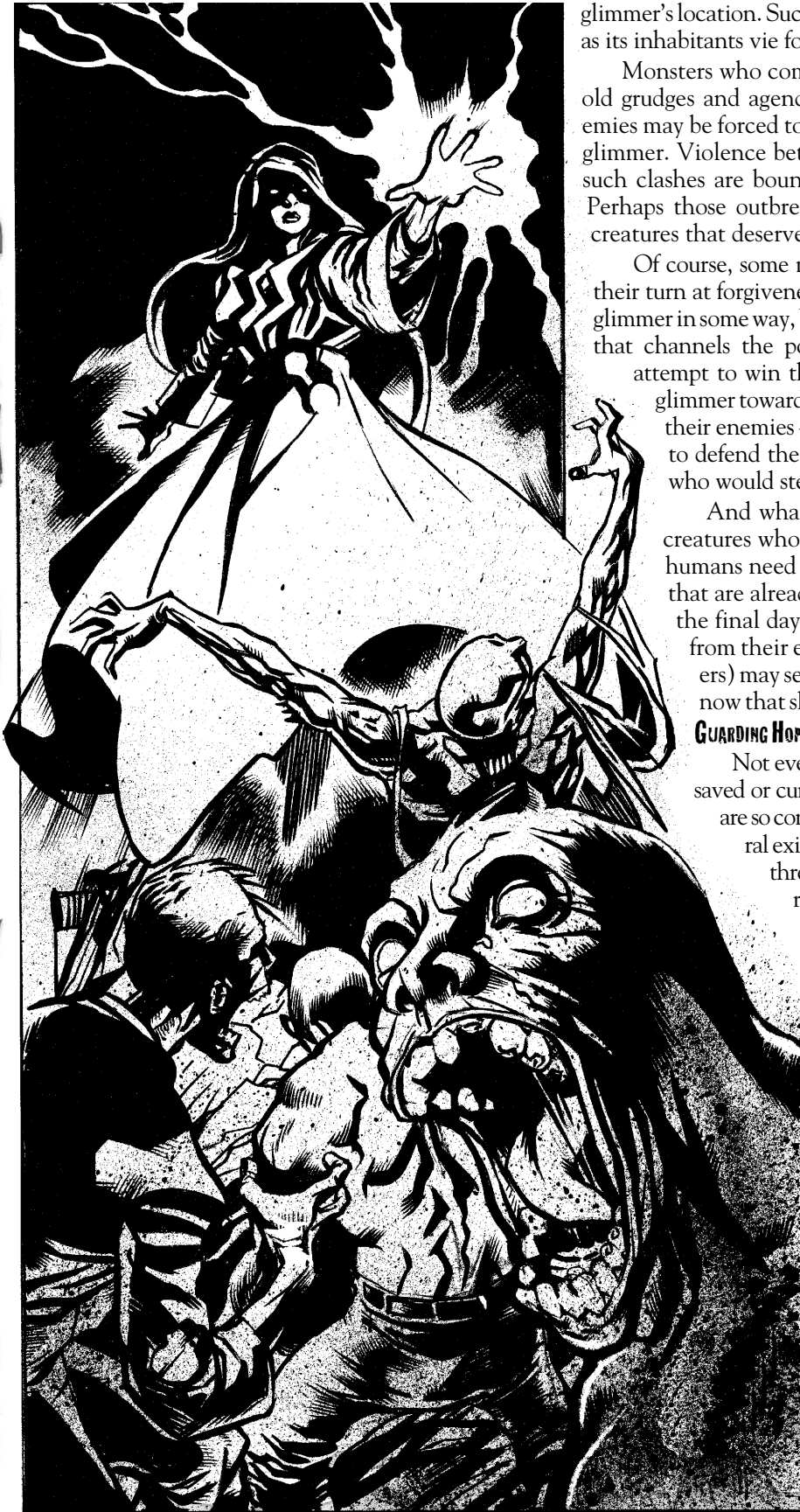
PILGRIMAGE

Attracted by the promise of salvation, creatures flood into the city, demanding or begging for the release of the glimmer. The hunters have to deal with this influx, controlling not only access to the source but also the damage creatures inflict on human refugees and inhabitants.

The following are some of the issues with which hunters may deal. Others may emerge, depending on what beings come for the glimmer's blessing.

If monsters flock to the city, they have to stay somewhere. What effect does this sudden influx of people — not just monsters, but perhaps their human followers — have on the ruined infrastructure of the city? Monsters such as vampires and ghosts that prey on humans to survive can't just *stop* while waiting for a chance at redemption. The hunters have to police their émigrés and prevent them from destroying what's left of the city.

Where do the creatures stay in the city? Some don't need shelter or food, but want to stay close to the glimmer lest they miss a chance to be blessed. A shantytown of monsters and their followers may spring up around the



glimmer's location. Such a town is a tense, dangerous place as its inhabitants vie for position and precious resources.

Monsters who come to the city may not leave their old grudges and agendas behind. Rivals and bitter enemies may be forced to wait side by side for access to the glimmer. Violence between creatures is inevitable, and such clashes are bound to have a toll in human lives. Perhaps those outbreaks even injure or destroy other creatures that deserved the glimmer's healing.

Of course, some monsters refuse to wait meekly for their turn at forgiveness. They try to take control of the glimmer in some way, by seizing it or capturing the hunter that channels the power. More subtle creatures may attempt to win the characters' favor, directing the glimmer toward their allies and minions and not at their enemies — or vice versa. The hunters need to defend the glimmer from the efforts of those who would steal or corrupt it.

And what of the glimmer's recipients, the creatures who are blessed? These newly normal humans need food, water and shelter, resources that are already scarce in the damaged world of the final days. They may also need protection from their enemies. Monsters (or other hunters) may seek to strike at a recovered monster now that she has lost her power and defenses.

GUARDING HOPE

Not every creature in the world wants to be saved or cured by the glimmer. Many monsters are so corrupt that they relish their supernatural existence and perceive the glimmer as a threat. The glimmer is destruction, not a reward, and they seek to lash out against it any way they can. They aren't alone, either. Some hunters may attempt to destroy the glimmer rather than permit the forgiveness of their hated enemies.

Protecting the source from attack plays a major part in this scenario. The following are some possible issues involving the power's defense.

The simplest form of attack is, of course, direct physical force. Less subtle monsters or creatures with powerful physical abilities may try to destroy the glimmer. This could mean murdering the hunter who channels the power or blowing up the location that houses the nexus. Depending on the monsters involved, this could be a surgical strike by an assassin or

demolitions expert, or an all-out assault by a horde of creatures and their followers. This kind of direct physical challenge can be bloody — and not just for the hunters. Normal people and saved monsters might be injured or lost in the battle.

Cunning monsters such as vampires, warlocks and demons may put subtle schemes into play. A monster might strike at the glimmer by capturing a hunter's family, threatening to kill loved ones if the power is not destroyed. Another option might be to distract the hunters with minions or other monster groups, leaving the glimmer unguarded. Monsters that influence governments, police or other institutions — even damaged as these groups are in the final days — could use them to harass, arrest or destabilize the characters, their allies or their friends. In response, hunters must draw on their own ingenuity and diplomatic skills rather than firepower and edges. They have something or someone personal to lose.

Depending on the nature of the glimmer, the hunters may not be able to defend it against certain attacks. If the power flows from a crack in reality or a spirit realm, the imbued cannot enter such an alien plane — but monsters such as demons, ghosts and werewolves *can*, and might strike at the source directly. The hunters may have to approach former or current enemies for aid, asking one set of monsters to fight another. But even if other creatures agree to help the characters, they're bound to demand a price. Can the imbued grant the blessing of the glimmer to creatures who don't deserve it — or withhold it from beings who do — in order to buy another day of protection?

Beyond monsters, another threat is posed to the glimmer: *other hunters*. Some chosen (especially those of the Mercy creeds) may see it as a boon. Others can see it as a get-out-of-jail-free card being handed out to monsters that deserve punishment, not forgiveness. These angry hunters may want to destroy the glimmer and any imbued who protect it, or use it as a weapon, a way of stripping creatures' powers before murdering the beings. Like monsters, enemy hunters might be overt or subtle in their attacks on the glimmer. Guardians might have to justify their actions to former allies in a calm debate, or they might have to find God⁴⁵ before the Wayward detonates a dirty nuclear bomb in the middle of the monster shantytown. How far are the hunters prepared to go to defend themselves against erstwhile allies, and how do monsters react to inter-hunter conflict?

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

The control and protection of the glimmer falls primarily to characters of the Mercy creeds. Through the use of the source, the Merciful can fulfill personal goals: to heal the supernatural corruption of this world and lessen the taint that spills into any subsequent world. It's a daunting task — the Merciful can never *completely* heal the world or negate the supernatural — but if the

right monsters can be redeemed, if enough can be done with the glimmer before it fades, then the hunters *might* make a difference.

The glimmer is limited in power and comes closer to exhaustion every time it's used. Ultimate responsibility for it, for making sure it's used as effectively as possible, goes to Merciful hunters.

Innocents: These hunters are the peacemakers and diplomats of the imbued. They might communicate with supernatural supplicants that seek (or demand) the glimmer's touch. When monsters come to the glimmer like moths to a flame, they may be confused, angry, violent or suspicious. Innocents could calm these beings, allay their fears that the glimmer is bait, or prevent them from lashing out at hunters and other people. As more and more creatures gather around the hunters, Innocents can spend more and more time interacting with them. Their duties might include administering to the growth of a shantytown, mediating a peace between rival creatures, or helping monsters evade attacks and reprisals from enemy hunters. Innocents can be the "public face" of the glimmer, and can bear the attention, temptation and aggression of unnatural supplicants.

Redeemers: No hunters have a more terrible task than Redeemers. They may feel responsible for deciding which creatures benefit from the glimmer's power. Not every hopeful can be saved, and only the most deserving may feel the power's touch. Redeemers are charged with picking and choosing between monsters, using their edges, knowledge and instincts to decide whom to forgive. Some Redeemers may choose to bless those creatures who are truly repentant, who have worked to push back their own damnation and who wish for nothing more than the return of their humanity. Other hunters might decide to use the glimmer on monsters who are truly evil and corrupt, to remove their hideous power from the world and neutralize their influence. No matter what criteria Redeemers use, no matter what advice they take, the final choice may be theirs alone. And if the wrong creature is touched by the glimmer, they must take responsibility for the outcome.

Martyrs: The blessing of the glimmer is a process, almost like a 12-step program to forgiveness. Innocents handle the intake of monsters, Redeemers control the actual moment of healing, while Martyrs may take charge of the aftereffects, the return of former monsters to humanity. This is a time of confusion, weakness and simple emotional suffering for a creature. No hunters understand pain and suffering better than Martyrs. It's up to these imbued to counsel saved monsters in what it means to be human, to protect them in their time of weakness, and to bring them back into the community. Martyrs also play a strong part in protecting the glimmer from attack, fighting alongside Zealots or on their own, and inspiring their comrades — and perhaps even the

ranks of former creatures — with their courage, devotion and sacrifice.

THE LIGHT FADES

The power of the glimmer is immense and world-changing, but it's not infinite. Sooner or later, depending on how heavily the characters draw upon it, the phenomenon is spent. The healing energy runs dry, the serum reserves are exhausted or the extremist is consumed by her own power. The glimmer is gone and the story draws to a close.

A story that results in the loss of the glimmer ends in a climax. The hunters have fought to control the power of the miracle, to heal willing (and perhaps unwilling) monsters of their unnatural state, and to make the final days less terrifying. They've probably suffered losses and setbacks, but they've (hopefully) also had triumphs. Have their actions made the next world a cleaner, less corrupt place?

If you don't want to wrap up the story there, a number of stories and situations can spin out of "Glimmer of Hope." Consider the following issues:

THE OTHER CREEDS

"Glimmer of Hope" emphasizes the role and purpose of the Mercy Virtue, to heal supernatural beings and in turn diminish their influence upon this age and that to come. But the Merciful aren't alone in their fight. Other creeds have a part to play in this scenario.

The Visionary: Using the glimmer on every monster that stumbles across one's path isn't a wise way to share a miracle. To have a true impact on the world and to make a *real* difference, hunters of Vision may direct the glimmer where it can best be used. Hermits can gather information about monsters and supplicants to the power, finding out which creatures have honest intentions and which are hopelessly corrupt. Visionaries look at the big picture, predicting what effects will follow the salvation of *this* monster rather than *that* one. As for Waywards, while the mad hunters *can* use their gifts to guide the use of the glimmer, they're likely to use it as a weapon, a means of crippling the powers of the supernatural.

The Zealous: Some see the glimmer not as a beacon of hope, but as an abomination that must be destroyed or as a resource to be exploited for their own ends. Adherents of Zeal are called upon to fight such aggressors. Avengers can take the fight to the attackers, striking at monsters and rogue hunters. Defenders protect the glimmer and the Merciful from harm, holding attackers at arm's length until help arrives. Judges determine battle plans, mapping out tactics to remove a threat while minimizing the toll on mortals and hopefuls alike.

- What happens to monsters who are human again? Can they be integrated into normal human society or whatever society exists after the final days? Some of them may have a change of heart once they experience all the bad aspects of being mortal and seek to return to their damned state, or take revenge on the hunters. Others might become targets of their old enemies or of humans wanting to punish their former dictators.

- What about the monsters that didn't receive the glimmer, who were rejected or turned away by the hunters? These creatures may seek revenge on the people that denied them salvation. Alternatively, some might pursue other means of redemption — means that may be true blessings or false promises held out as a monstrous trick. What do characters do if they learn that a demon is undoing all of their efforts by drawing repentant monsters back into damnation?

- For that matter, are there truly other means of salvation out there that the hunters can put to use? The glimmer was a singular power, but it might *not* be unique. If another similar force exists, the hunters may be able to find it and this time avoid any mistakes made before. Of course, other forces — from monsters to other hunters to former creatures of darkness — are desperate to find and control this new power, too.

WINDS OF CHANGE

Overview: The old rules have broken and now seemingly small changes can sweep the world. When normal humans are motivated to hew closer to the imbued and acknowledge the protectors in their midst, it's a golden opportunity to make a real difference. But to do so, the imbued must finally unify and dedicate themselves to a single cause.

"Winds of Change" emphasizes the Vision Virtue. The imbued have always been held back by the inability of humanity to recognize the corruption of the supernatural. But what happens when normal folks start to believe? With the power of the people behind them, hunters can act openly, coming together to fight the darkness. Before that can happen, though, the imbued must overcome their own differences and agree on a goal that can be achieved, a dream that can be realized. This story focuses heavily on interaction between hunters, other imbued groups and ordinary people. The emphasis is on planning, leading and organizing, on aiming for a lofty goal and doing whatever it takes to reach it.

A CRACK IN THE MIRROR

For millennia, humanity has lived in ignorance of the monsters that lurk at society's heart, that influence nations and that commit atrocities behind the scenes. This ignorance is due to supernatural powers of subterfuge and disguise, and to these beings' cunning and secrecy. But the most important factor is humanity's reluctance or inability to believe the truth, even when

evidence is shoved in their collective face. When confronted with the supernatural, humans tend to rationalize it away, lapse into hysteria or simply deny the truth. They *want* to remain in blissful ignorance.

Not anymore.

“Winds of Change” proposes that normal people are ready to believe in the supernatural. This change may come about as a result or side effect of civilization’s destruction in the final days. Or this newfound resilience is the *trigger* for the final days and the tearing down of the old order. In either case, something has stripped away the human tendency for amnesia. Now when normal people encounter the supernatural — whether they see a ghost in a deserted house, survive a vampire’s attack or watch footage of a rampaging werewolf — they accept it for what it is, not for what they’ve been told it *should* be.

Of course, all this change doesn’t mean humans can suddenly detect monsters or see through supernatural tricks. That capacity remains beyond people, as the burden of hunters who activate second sight. Nor can mortals read hunter code or resist a monster’s mind-control powers. Yet, the underpinning of the world’s corruption — the inability of the human masses to even see that corruption exists — is gone. This upset of the status quo changes the world forever.

EARLY DAYS

The hunters already believe in the supernatural, of course, so they aren’t directly affected by the change in the world’s rules. The scenario starts with the dawning realization that reality has changed, that the characters can take advantage of this new situation. The following are possible hooks to draw the hunters into the story, but many possibilities exist.

- In the aftermath of a confrontation with the supernatural (whether peaceful or violent), the hunters are surrounded by people who want to know what the hell that creature was, or what just happened. Accustomed to onlookers panicking or rationalizing away the supernatural, characters may be startled to realize that people believe the evidence before their eyes, or at least don’t instantly reject the notion of the inhuman.

- Footage of a monster fighting a hunter appears on the Internet or on television. The images are quickly pulled and the story is buried by the corrupt controllers of the media, but the damage is done. As they go about their daily lives, the characters encounter people debating what the footage really depicted, and whether or not supernatural forces were involved.

- When a creature (perhaps a warlock or demon) uses its powers openly in a confrontation with the characters, mortal onlookers don’t run. Indeed, a mob of angry people attacks the creature, forcing it to flee or perhaps giving the hunters a chance to take it down.

These changes in people’s beliefs may occur slowly over the course of several stories, or it might happen

DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

The fading of the masses’ disbelief isn’t a *completely* positive development for the imbued. Some creatures — most notably demons, warlocks and goblins — were actually hampered by disbelief before. The great secret suppressed their supernatural powers and forced them to work quietly. With disbelief gone, these creatures are free to do as they wish and put overt plans and powers into motion. Hunters may set out to achieve bold new goals only to find some of their opposition even more powerful than before.

overnight. In either case, the change is not just local but global. Stories of humanity’s acceptance of the supernatural surface in the media and in underground networks such as hunter-net, and propagate by word of mouth.

Open acceptance of monsters means that the greatest obstacles facing the imbued — their inability to act openly, to gain support from their friends or society at large — is eliminated. The characters are still vulnerable to attacks and reprisals from enemies. They may still have to work in secret to remain safe. But now they can attract followers and aid, explain their actions to the people they love, and aim at important goals.

HEARTS AND MINDS

Individually, each hunter is a lone soldier, peacemaker or planner. But with a legion of human supporters and believers behind them, the imbued can now become *guides* — leaders of an army, a political revolution or a spiritual reawakening. If hunters can convince normal people to aid them, to lend support to a specific goal, the chosen can make real headway in the struggle. This is a time for hunters (especially those of the Vision creeds) to set their sights on major, concrete objectives. It’s an opportunity to stop maintaining the status quo and start making a real *difference*.

It’s likely that characters make large-scale plans as soon as they realize they can gain the support of the masses. If they don’t, other imbued groups elsewhere do and the characters may see the results. Perhaps news reports show riots in other cities, with the ringleaders holding up banners bearing hunter code symbols. A politician is torn apart by a mob after other hunters expose him as a monster. A cult movement forms around a charismatic preacher who claims that monsters are real. You can use scenes such as these to light a fire under players, driving home the point that the old rules have changed and that great things are possible.

Of course, if hunters want to draw on the strength and support of the people they need to *win* that support. People may no longer dismiss the supernatural out of hand, but they still need to be convinced that accusers are right — and be persuaded to aid in any effort. It doesn’t help that people are still *afraid* of the supernatu-

ral, and likely to panic when they encounter monsters. If the characters want converts, they need to challenge public fear by motivating normal humans to fight back.

Fear may be overridden with outrage or anger. If the characters know of a particularly vile or abhorrent creature, revealing its true nature could infuriate the public such that they're more incensed than terrified. If the hunters prove that a prominent figure such as a politician or celebrity is a murderer, child molester or ruthless manipulator *before* revealing his monstrous nature, mobs may respond by swarming the creature rather than running away. Once the furor dies down, hunters can try to rally the frightened but (hopefully) convinced and invigorated humans to their cause.

Alternatively, characters might try to gain supporters more peacefully and rationally, convincing them of the truth intellectually without exposing folks to danger or terror. For instance, hunters could gather evidence that the supernatural is real — photographs, videotapes, witnesses, even the corpses of monsters — and present it all to appropriate people. Taking this material to journalists is one possibility, but it has its dangers. The media may still be controlled or manipulated by monsters and their followers, and hunters' efforts might only attract unwanted attention from dangerous enemies. Another possibility is for the chosen to personally convince friends, families and personal contacts, everyone from co-workers to church members. Word of mouth spreads from there, from other people who are trusted.

Many other methods exist for hunters to gain support. They could form a cult, preaching the truth about the supernatural. They could rally a street gang around themselves, recruiting new members as society crumbles. They could even set up a website with photos, documents and forums, almost like a "civilian" version of hunter-net, tapping into the rising tide of online belief.

However the hunters approach the task, the process of gathering followers can occupy several chapters of the story. Once they win support, however, they need to *use* it. They need a *purpose*.

PERSISTENCE OF VISION

Goals, plans and foresight are the province of the Vision creeds, who may have been intended by the Messengers to lead the imbued into the final days. That's not a role that the other hunters have always accepted, of course, or that Visionary hunters have understood themselves. Before now, the business of planning and thinking about where the imbued are going has often taken a back seat to simple survival, and long-term goals have given way to short-term successes.

With humanity emerging from its blindness, however, the situation has changed. It's time for Vision to take command, and for the leaders of hunters to take their rightful place in imbued society. But the three Vision creeds are very different in their approaches to



the hunt, other imbued and humanity. Those differences affect both the goals such leaders choose and the relationships they form with supporters.

Hermits: Separated from their fellow imbued by crippling headaches and mental static, Hermits naturally prefer the company of ordinary people (when they must endure company at all). Hermits are best suited to working directly with hunters' supporters. As the imbued form a support network, Hermits can work within that normal community, sharing information and relaying the general mentality of the masses to other hunters. Hermits are also vital to gathering the details needed to develop plans and goals, using their edges and capabilities to learn and disseminate information. The challenge for Hermits is balancing any loyalty to ordinary friends and associates with the overall sacrifice and loss demanded by hunters' plans. Can individual losses be tolerated for the greater good?

Waywards: Just as Hermits can work within society, so are the near-psychotic Waywards connected to the imbued. Waywards tend to be contemptuous of other hunters, but at least they recognize that other chosen have a function. Normal humans, however, may be considered little more than cannon fodder or bait. That attitude that can only drive supporters away. A hunter group led by a Wayward is likely to work toward a violent and bloody goal, and probably suffers great losses in the struggle to reach it. Even other hunters may be expendable to a Wayward, and imbued allies could become enemies once the destructive plans of a Wayward are revealed. But in the final days, when monsters rampage and civilization crumbles, the savage inspiration and power of a Wayward may be the only means to fulfilling a goal.

Visionaries: The only truly sane creed following the Vision Virtue, these hunters are perhaps best suited to lead both imbued and ordinary people to a dream. With their predictive and information-gathering edges, they can uncover the data needed to formulate plans and strategies, while their humanity and inspirational powers can rally support. But with that purpose and presence comes responsibility, more so than for Hermits and Waywards. A Visionary must be the interface between hunters and their supporters, able to lead from the front lines and advise from safety. No other hunter better understands the price that must be paid to reach important goals. A Visionary must justify that price to both imbued and human allies. This is the role for which seers were created, perhaps the purpose the Messengers always intended. It's a thankless and punishing task, however. One that can destroy a leader before her aspiration is fulfilled.

AIMING HIGH

Great things can be achieved only if hunters strive for them. Until now, most hunters have had to settle for small victories and minor achievements, unable to make truly significant changes to the world. But now the status quo has changed, the impossible is possible. Difficult and

THE OTHER CREEDS

"Winds of Change" focuses on the Vision creeds, revolving around lofty goals and the organization required to meet them. But the Vision creeds are not alone in this struggle; other imbued have a part to play in attaining the final reward.

The Merciful: To these hunters falls the responsibility of protecting and nurturing both hunters and supporters — not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually. Innocents can lift the spirits of battle-scarred and frightened imbued with edges and sheer optimism, and can fan the flame of hope in human supporters. Martyrs may inspire ordinary people with their courage and readiness for sacrifice, and protect folks from the terrors of the supernatural. Redeemers can heal the sick and give strength to the weak, inspiring loyalty in the most cynical of skeptics.

The Zealous: As the imbued work toward their goals, monsters lash out against the upstarts. The Zealous must be ready to protect their leaders. Avengers are charged with bringing the battle to the enemy, taking out creatures that stand in the path of the imbued agenda. Defenders protect planners and information gatherers from attack, and shield allies from harm. Judges can work closely with Visionary leaders, developing tactical plans to win the battles that take the imbued closer to winning the war.

dangerous, but possible. With the backing of supporters and the potential to gain more, hunters can move beyond their old arenas and set their sights on meaningful and important accomplishments. Such as? Well, that's up to the characters to determine. The central purpose of "Winds of Change" is to put the imbued in a position to achieve great things, assuming they have the inspiration to find a meaningful goal.

A major goal is nothing more or less than *changing the world*. This is action on a national or even international scale. Rather than exposing the mayor's monstrous nature, the characters try to bring down the entire government. Instead of disrupting vampiric control of a crime family, the hunters attempt to break the bloodsuckers' control over the country. And rather than be satisfied with small glimpses of the truth and the meaning behind the imbuing, the chosen settle for nothing less than knowing *everything*. Major goals are only conceivable once hunters know that the masses can accept the truth. To actually attain these goals — to change the world irrevocably even as it crumbles around their ears — the imbued must gain the support of not just a few dozen or even hundreds of normal folks. They must gain the support of thousands. This is not something that can be accomplished alone or at once. To attain a major goal, the hunters must ally with other imbued across the world.

INHERITING THE EARTH

If and when the characters decide to aim for a major goal and realize that they need help, “Winds of Change” moves into its final phase. To reach their goal, the imbued need to recruit other hunter groups (and their human supporters) to the cause. The greater the goal, the bigger the network needs to be. In the process of bringing hunters together, the characters may accomplish something even more important — the creation of a hunter society. And even after the goal is reached (or perhaps even if the plan fails), that society of hunters, working openly to change the world, remains in the wake of the final days. Perhaps that unification was the unseen, greatest goal possible.

The final phase of “Winds of Change” is open-ended. The story could wrap up quickly as the hunters overcome every obstacle in their path, or they’re cut down before their crusade even begins. More likely, though, is a story told through several chapters, with the imbued slowly marshalling their allies. The story ends when their goal is finally fulfilled or lost. Here are some factors to consider when developing the chronicle.

Keeping the Faith: To maintain the support of normal people, hunters need to do more than simply use edges and fight monsters. People must be protected from danger and kept safe from the chaos and terrors of the final days, even if it puts hunters at great risk. If some supporters are lost to violence, the characters have to work all the harder to preserve the loyalty of those who remain.

Communication: If the hunters want to recruit the help of other imbued, they need to reach those hunters somehow. Hunter-net is one means of contact, but it may not function as society falls apart. Characters may have to resort to simpler methods such as telephone calls, face-to-face meetings or even letters. Other options might be using the media, sending messengers, or the use of edges and creed capabilities.

Negotiation and Compromise: The characters are not the only hunters trying to make a difference in the final days. Other groups work toward their own goals and may have little or no interest in cooperating with the characters. Indeed, other groups may try to persuade the characters to abandon their goal and dedicate themselves to a different agenda. If the imbued want the help of their fellows, they may need to make formal alliances and deals — quid-pro-quo arrangements to help both groups achieve their desires.

Killing Rivalries: Some hunter groups have no interest in compromise or agreement. Their goals are intrinsically opposed to the characters’. If one group seeks to make an alliance with demons to uncover the mysteries of reality, while another seeks to wipe demons from the face of the Earth, there can be only conflict between them.

Monstrous Reprisal: Of course, the supernatural corrupters of the world do not sit idly by while humanity

unites against them. Even in the final days, monsters influence society, control gangs and police forces, and possess terrible powers. United and public hunter groups make themselves — and their supporters — targets.

Success: If, despite all these obstacles and complications, the hunters finally reach their goal and change the world, you don’t have to stop there. Anything is possible in the final days. Perhaps the characters, backed by a web of imbued and a nation of supporters, can do the impossible. Maybe they can build a new world for humanity, free reality from corruption and truly inherit the Earth. At the very least, they can try.

STORYTELLING THE END

The end is nigh. The Book of Life is about to slam shut. Welcome to Armageddon.

Man has long predicted its coming. The Aztecs said the world would end in 2012. Romans believed that 12 mystical eagles revealed to the founders of the Empire the exact date when civilization would collapse around their ears. The Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation both pull back the curtain to show exactly how God’s wrath will send sinners to Hell and believers to salvation. Modern-day doomsday prophecies suggest that we will die by meteor, comet, plague, biological warfare, nuclear winter, terrorism, or by a thousand other ways to meet our proverbial maker. Man has predicted Armageddon time and again, and each time we were wrong.

Not this time.

Hunters have a special relationship with Armageddon. Unwittingly, the imbued are both signposts marking the demise of the world, and key participants in the approaching doom. Those brutal taskmasters, the Messengers, seem to have chosen certain people to be their eyes and ears during the last days — perhaps not to stop the end of the world, but to simply *diminish its impact*. The very appearance of hunters is indicative that the end is on its way, and now that it’s all hitting the fan, the chosen may have to decide. Do they help cushion the fall of mankind, refusing to accept that the finale is necessary and unstoppable? Or do they stand aside and let annihilation happen, leaving reality to sink into oblivion? Is it possible that the end can be stopped, that it can be denied and defeated in the last critical hours? It’s time to find out, because the final nails in humanity’s coffin are about to be driven.

GAME OVER?

This chapter is about storytelling the end in a **Hunter: The Reckoning** chronicle. A story like this is ostensibly the summation of hunters’ very existence; the very presence of the imbued is tied closely to the end of the world. Everything else up to this point — the plague of walking dead, leeches feeding on the defenseless,

wizards toying with mortals — has been practice. This is what hunters were made for.

Giving the players a game of this magnitude is no small task. It's not a one-shot session in which you quickly close the doors on the World of Darkness. This kind of story is meant for a series of game sessions over which the characters take center stage against a backdrop of civilization's demise. While some characters may have anticipated the last days, players don't typically expect you to run a game in which the world ends. No longer is it just about a desperate struggle against a single monster, or a story about the salvation of a handful of spirits. This is an epic game told in the simple, humanist clothes of **Hunter**. You may tell a tale of an imbued army marching on a monster-controlled city, while ancient vampires and powerful, long-dead spirits consume the masses. Or maybe the characters gain the attention of and communicate with the Messengers in an effort to bring salvation to all creatures. It's even possible that the hunters in your game find some means to help avert — or at least soften — the final blow.

Any tale of this magnitude is the culmination of all the themes inherent to **Hunter** — fear of the unknown, the battle of the underdog, and the value of the individual and the group.

PLOTTING THE LAST DAYS

The end times don't have one conclusion or one road to that destination. There has always been a loose metaplot to **Hunter**, one that may have directed the actions of individual chosen through a specified cosmology. But the metaplot has existed to serve as an example, not the rule. The same applies here. Nothing requires you to impose a canonical wrap up on your troupe. The circumstances surrounding Armageddon (how, when, why) are up to you, not us. What's presented in this chapter is little more than suggestion, a hand to help you carry your players and characters into the mouth of catastrophe — and possibly back out again.

But one of the things that should be in your game is a consistent story arc. A story arc is, of course, a general design that you devise for the tale, with a beginning, middle and end. Along the way, you come up with "seminal" plot points — events that mean something in the grand scope of this apocalyptic game. These seminal developments could be "the death of a loved one," "betrayal by a staunch ally," or even "assistance from a former enemy." It's the overall epic of how your chronicle closes.

You can fall into a trap when creating an arc and plot points, however. Sketching out a rough plan and detailing key events sometimes leads you to believe that these things *have* to happen, regardless of the actions or interests of the players. The characters are the ones in the spotlight; your story arc is merely the stage on which they stand. It's critical

to be flexible in telling this kind of story. Say, for example, that you have a terrible nihil open in Times Square, and from that tiny pinprick between worlds a whole hoary host of vengeful spirits comes forth. Maybe you think the characters need to close the breach, but they try to manipulate another hunter group into doing it, instead. Or maybe they try to wade in and redeem as many emerging spirits as possible, potentially sacrificing themselves in the process. Perhaps you didn't expect that response. But just because you didn't expect it doesn't mean you should try to stop the characters from doing it. Nor should you rule out the possibility (however difficult) that they could succeed.

The characters are not mere puppets caught up in the violent throes of the world's last gasp. They're active participants in Armageddon. It's particularly important to make the players realize the importance of their creations. A game about the end times may be frustrating. Hunters could feel as if there's nothing they can do to plug the dam. As Storyteller, you need to show players that their characters have absolute free will in your game. You can do that by letting them respond to catastrophic dangers as they like, and you respond to their actions rather than force their hand.

Once you have a sense for the flexibility needed in a chronicle of this caliber, you should define two things before plotting out the actual events of the last days. You need to establish your *inner story* and *outer story*.

Most stories, whether writers are conscious of it are not, demonstrate these two elements. The inner story is the plot of individual characters. The outer story is the over-arching development of a setting that's external to the characters (potentially a town, a city or the whole world). The outer story of *Star Wars* details the rebellion against the Empire, but the inner story is about a boy's coming of age. The outer story of the movie *Signs* is about strange aliens that have left behind navigational marks in the form of crop circles, and now they use them to invade. The inner story is about a man, his family and the renewal of his lost faith. In a **Hunter**-style Armageddon, the outer story is about the world coming to an end, and certain men and women have been "chosen" to avert or lessen the impact. The inner story is about the handful of individual characters played by your troupe.

In an "end of the world" game, the outer story assumes that these are the last days. Beyond that, the outer story is entirely up to you. All the variables are in your hands. Why is it happening? When is it happening? What actually happens? Does a meteor strike the Earth? Does the Creator send fire and burning pitch from the sky to "cleanse" humanity? Has too much evil been allowed into the world and now the Earth grows sick from the corruption? All of this is up to you, but it all comprises cosmic events and repercussions. Designing the outer story involves you coming up with the reasons behind and seminal events in these days of reckoning.

The inner story is just as important (if not more so). This is the tale that keeps players invested in their characters, because this story is specifically about them, even when set against the backdrop of the end. The inner story features events that are personal to the characters. Perhaps one of their mothers, daughters or friends dies. While thousands of others may perish, the loss of a loved one stands out as a significant part of a character's personal story. Maybe the group finally has a chance to deal a long-standing enemy, with no consequences beyond themselves. It could be that one of the hunters has a desire to reconcile with an estranged brother, or decides to ask his fiancée to marry him "in what time we have left." It's all about the intimate stories of the players' characters. While the events of the world certainly have bearing on the lives of all the imbued, the inner story focuses specifically on the players' characters.

The trick of creating a compelling cataclysm is combining the two separate styles of story into a seamless whole. In *Star Wars*, Luke Skywalker's teenage rebellion echoes the universe-spanning rebellion against the Empire, and the two stories become intertwined. While the family in *Signs* has no direct affect on the events of the outer story, their experience is still a part of it, a microcosm of planetary invasion, finding faith and the defeat of the aliens. Hunters in your game should be no different. Imbued working together on a

small problem and seeking to destroy, understand or save a single monster are still representative of the whole. Characters using their personal experiences to fuel a greater mission (such as learning more about the end, joining an army of other hunters, or destroying the ruling body of bloodsuckers in a town) is a case of the inner story feeding the outer.

Several of the scenarios proposed previously in this chapter rely on inner and outer stories uniting. Characters act locally, but their actions can be a reflection of other imbued activities occurring globally. Characters' struggle to claim a city or to select the most deserving monsters to be spared can suggest (or be impetus for) wider phenomena. The imbued collectively free or lose the earth once and for all, or make an impression on the powers that be with their charity.

Example: A Defender with strong family ties and natural leadership may apply those strength to direct disparate groups of chosen and mortal "resistance." An Innocent in prison may find the place suddenly abandoned, the doors blown open. He is free to go back into the world and pay true penance for his crimes, helping to salve the pain of the coming Armageddon. Or maybe a Visionary who has long had problems finding her role among hunters is granted visions and secrets from the Messengers that pertain to the last days. Her charge is to carry them to the rest of the imbued. In each of these cases



is a small story and a large one. The first focuses on the life of the individual while the second applies to the wider changes underway. When these connect, make a whole, they unify inner and outer developments in a story arc.

THE NATURE OF THE END

A lot of options are available when plotting the last gasp of the world. What follows is a brief discussion of some design choices that may help you decide exactly what mood, theme and style of Armageddon you want to occur in your chronicle. You don't need to decide on a single element; most of these can be combined to create your own approach.

NATURAL OR MONSTROUS?

Creatures poison the foundation of the world, corrupting society and bleeding the planet of its mystical resources. A *monstrous* Armageddon is directly caused by and involves beasts. Vampires enslave humanity. People who die end up as the walking dead. Werewolves breed uncontrollably, plaguing the civilized world. All of these are examples of a monstrous end.

A *natural* end quite literally involves the natural world going berserk. Earthquakes shatter cities, chaotic weather systems ground planes and sink ships, the ice caps melt and oceans rise over coastlines to drown humanity. The monstrous angle is seemingly put aside as the world veritably rejects its inhabitants.

The question is why would you choose either end? A monstrous one is intuitive for **Hunter**. The characters' ongoing struggle reaches its climax. But maybe you don't want your game to end on a predictable note. Maybe there's been an undercurrent of a different, more ominous problem inherent to the characters' dealings with creatures. What might be the thematic purpose of setting aside the conflicts of man versus monster in favor of man versus nature? Do you want to imply that nature is a deciding force in the world and it's decided? Or perhaps Mother Nature was really the number one enemy all along.

Ultimately, a natural end presents a problem: Can anything really be done about it? Do the characters have any hope of stopping a tidal wave or typhoon? One option is that cosmic forces bringing about Armageddon may forestall natural disasters if hunters present a strong, hopeful or moral example, argument or rationale. Or perhaps you *want* the helplessness intrinsic to a natural Armageddon. Perhaps such an ending affirms that monsters *and* humans are an affront to nature.

EPIC OR HUMAN?

An epic **Hunter** game hasn't been touched on much in other supplements, but a story set in the context of Armageddon is a good chance to finally play one. Epic tales unfold in grand spectacle, not with small steps. The imbued may literally go to war, assaulting a wizardly powerbase in a major metropolitan area. Shapechangers and bloodsuckers clash openly under a blood-red moon.

The skies darken with spirits, damned creatures howling over the wind. An epic tale involves hunters actually having a place in the end, not simply being anonymous participants. The characters themselves affect the course of the world, perhaps even whether everything is destroyed or humanity somehow endures. You allow the characters to take center stage as heroes — troubled heroes, flawed heroes — but heroes nonetheless.

A *human* approach to the end times is subtle. The world probably falls apart around the characters' ears, but they're not central to Armageddon itself. They're still the focus of your chronicle, but the story is personal. Instead of marshaling a troop of Zealots against a blood-sucker stronghold, the hunters may finally go up against a long-standing, single enemy. They don't go to the front lines to heal fallen comrades. They try to make their neighborhood better in these last days. This human angle is a microcosm of what's going on in the broader world. Chaos ensues and everything falls apart, but the hunters deal with only one small portion of the chaos, trying to keep friends, family and themselves from being victims.

It's also possible that epic and human styles can be blended. The hunters still have their human, inner story of making peace with loved ones and enacting vengeance (or salvation) upon long-elusive enemies, but this "small" story contributes to the larger whole. Hunters "just doing their part" in their hometown may earn the direct attention of the Messengers and are "rewarded" with significant power provided they go out into the world to use it. Or maybe characters who have long attempted to discover the secrets behind a slumbering vampire learn that the leech is not only awake, but rallying hundreds of other vampires to its side. Personal stories contribute to bigger victories and apocalyptic developments, and characters may be swept into events that never involved them before. And from there comes the chance for salvation or a "stay of execution."

The combination of epic and human themes returns to the point of creating a game that tells inner and outer stories. It lets hunters remain human and humble, yet immerses them in world-spanning events.

IMPOSED OR SELF-INDUCED?

One of the questions that needs to be answered is *what caused this?* Armageddon doesn't just happen. Somehow, somewhere, there must be a reason, however inscrutable, behind the coming of the last days. If the end of the world is self-imposed, humanity is responsible for bringing it down on everybody's head. If it's imposed, the cause of the end is outside humanity's control, and more importantly not mankind's fault.

In a *self-induced* scenario, man brings about his own undoing. Perhaps our dark side was long ago made manifest in monsters, and now the damning repercussions are felt. It could be that humanity's compulsion to

BANG OR WHIMPER?

In his poem "The Hollow Men," T. S. Eliot writes: "This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a whimper." How will *your* game world end?

Bang denotes a big "event" chronicle. Happenings are overt and obvious. Demons wage war in the streets, the sky rains blood, a hunter sets off a suitcase nuke in downtown Philadelphia. *Whimper* is a subtle (and arguably creepier) Armageddon. It builds slowly. Events are hidden and covert. The crickets stop chirping. The moon turns red. The Messengers communicate through every billboard, magazine cover and street sign.

The more obvious chronicle plays to an "action-horror" style of game, a lot of "run-and-gun," so to speak. It relates to the epic style discussed near here. The subtle version (relating to the human approach) works well when you want to achieve a paranoid, conspiracy-horror angle with a more Lovecraftian and less *Resident Evil* mood. Perhaps an ideal game combines both. The slow and subtle elements develop over time into a more obvious, bang-zoom style, or perhaps you simply intersperse overt and understated elements to mix things up. Do what works best for your game and the mood you desire.

dominate the world and tap its resources causes global death. Or maybe mankind has simply created too many havens and weapons for the creatures (industry, politics, disease, war) and becomes a victim of its own handiwork. Thematically, using this scenario makes man the architect of his own unmaking. That's the bad news. The good news is that perhaps there's a chance to turn things around (which is where hunters come in).

It's also possible that hunters are somehow at fault for impending doom. Perhaps their creation comes at a price, tearing the last of the Seven Seals that keeps demons at bay. Or maybe the rise of infernal hunters (a marriage of demonic influence and Messenger power) heralds annihilation. Can hunters, realizing that they are inherently complicit in the end, orchestrate a way to undo what's been done? Maybe they have to kill or silence all the infernal imbued — or their own kind — for the world to remain.

If the end of the world is *imposed*, some outside force has levied an abstract judgment on civilization and plans to destroy it for some reason. Humanity is essentially without blame. If a host of primeval vampires awakens and sets in motion a plan to enslave mankind, the end is imposed. It's not humanity's fault if werewolves "cull the herd" and kill people or put them in slave-labor camps. Or if a conspiracy of magicians decides to assassinate major political figures in an effort to trigger World War III.

In the classic **Hunter** situation of man-against-monster, the end is imposed by the beings that the imbued face. It instills a sense of desperation, giving characters a feeling that things were never in their control. But, alternatively, it motivates them to take control back. Indeed, imagine if some outside cosmic force levied judgment on the world — humans *and* monsters. The imbued could work *with* creatures to combat the external threat.

A self-induced game turns the typical **Hunter** chronicle on its ear. The enemy is no longer other, externalized, but the self and internalized. Characters have to ask what they need to change about themselves, loved ones and humanity to save life on Earth. Is it possible that working with monsters is fundamental to finding salvation?

THE END OR NEW BEGINNING?

Depending on how true to **Hunter** cosmology your chronicle is, the imbued may never have been created to stop Armageddon. The Ministers chose people knowing that the end of the world would be unavoidable. Armageddon is part of a cosmic cycle — fall becomes winter, day turns to night, stars burn out and die. When it's finished, the world will enter a new age as the cycle turns. A dark age will set in, followed by renewal and a new golden age. The problem is, if the coming storm is too terrible, too potent, it could destroy the whole cycle. Hunters may have been chosen to cushion the blow and hold things together just long enough to allow the cycle to turn. You get to decide how effective the imbued are, perhaps even more so than the Ministers could have imagined.

In a *final end* chronicle, hunters fail at the Ministers' task and the world ends in oblivion, never to enter another age. In a *new beginning* game, the storm comes and destroys the world as we know it, but then moves on and the wheel turns to a new era. Hunters are successful in softening the impact; oblivion is eluded.

What's the purpose of playing a chronicle that culminates in annihilation? Characters who discover that there's really no hope, no light at the end of the tunnel may feel that the only option is to eat a bullet. Or maybe not. Seeing that the true end nears, hunters may seek to make peace with the world however they can. This could mean reconciling with lost family, obtaining a long-sought answer from a reluctant monster, or driving a truck full of explosives into a creature's stronghold. It's also possible that characters learn of the final end and refuse to believe it, continuing to rage against the dying of the light. A strong sense of dramatic irony is achieved when players believe that the end is coming but their characters do not.

A *new beginning* is the intended outcome of Armageddon, at least according to the Ministers' designs. Currently, the world is in autumn and the end times are winter. If hunters do their job, winter ends and spring becomes the "new beginning." Sure, the world is changed and there's no

telling how little of the population might remain, but the point is things don't truly end. Storytellers using this scenario may want to continue the chronicle in a "what if?" capacity, offering an altered world in the wake of the last days. This scenario allows for more hope than the previous option, because hunters can make a difference.

And yet, a third option exists. Maybe your game doesn't follow **Hunter** canon or you simply want to allow for more possibility. In this case, hunters surprise or defy the Ministers and are actually able to stop Armageddon before it's too late. How? It depends on the nature of the end in your game. If a triumvirate of wicked spirits is behind events, the characters might lead an army against the beings' anchors (a graveyard, a decrepit factory and a burned-down elementary school), separating the spirits from the material world. Also consider the possibility that the characters are watched by the Ministers. Maybe if the characters' actions are deemed worthy, the forces decide that the cataclysm is stopped. This kind of "judgment" puts the characters and their actions at center stage.

REVELATIONS

The end of days has arrived. In Storytelling it, you're the one who determines how it might all play out. The end of the world isn't likely to just start one morning and finish by evening. It builds, grows and changes. Like a train on a one-way trip, the story passes some unavoidable landmarks that you create. How can you show the players and their characters that something is horribly wrong? What elements of the last days play out over the course of the game before the hunters' eyes? There's the build-up to events and then the events themselves. The variables for each are limitless, but we've hammered out a few to consider and use, or that may foster new ideas of your own.

EVENTS

The events that lead up to and demonstrate the end times should be somewhat hunter-specific in order to get the message through to characters. That way they can see it coming and act accordingly, rather than just be victims of it all like every other person on Earth. Several conditions of being imbued, as hunters know them, may change to suggest that something *big* is underway.

EDGES

A hunter's edges are among his few unprecedented tools available for dealing with monsters. At the end, all bets are off and the circumstances of even the supernatural are in flux. Hunters' powers are already mysterious and frightening. Almost anything could happen to them when any and all rules are broken in the last days. Hunters may lose all of their edges as their connection to the Messengers is severed. The Heralds may seek to strengthen the connection, hoping to infuse the chosen with a greater sense of purpose and ability. Perhaps each character gets an additional dot in her primary edge path

(and points in the Patron Background), increasing her preternatural aptitude. Or the Messengers go all out and every hunter is afforded the sudden opportunity to advance to the level-five edge in his primary path; the cap on level-five edges is lifted. Characters whose goals and calling doesn't compel them to such extremity might aim for more subtle effects (Virtue points can be spent on more and different creed paths). Maybe the cost to purchase Virtues is halved (or doubled).

You need to decide: Is hunters' spiritual weaponry fortified at the end times. Or are the imbued no longer "necessary" according to the grand design and their supernatural arsenal is weakened or severed?

HUNTER CODE

The hunter code allows for mysterious, clandestine communication between the chosen. Whether sprayed on a wall or printed in a classified ad, the code allows a certain level of covert contact among the imbued. But it's not learned, it's intrinsic to the chosen from the very moment of their change. And *that* means the hunter code is a spiritual entity, another gift from the Heralds. What does the advent of Armageddon do to the code? Again, are hunters' bestowed capabilities weakened, strengthened or do they simply become erratic? Does the code explode with hundreds — or thousands — of new symbols, becoming a full language? Or does it cease to make sense, becoming meaningless to *any* hunter who sees it? Maybe only those imbued with level-four or five edges can read it, implying that the Heralds demand powerful soldiers in these grim times. Or is it possible that normal humans can suddenly understand the signs? Or worse, maybe *monsters* can read it. What happens when the enemy can suddenly tap into the secret cipher shared by the imbued?

MESSENGERS

No hunter exists without the guidance of the Messengers. Some may consider communication "from above" gospel. Others believe it to be little more than hallucination. One hunter may have a constant connection, while another may have suffered otherworldly intrusion only once, at the imbuement. The Messengers exist beyond this reality, but they are still affected by it. When Armageddon builds and hits, the "transmissions" hunters receive are sure to be altered. Perhaps all (or only some) chosen experience a disturbing escalation in the number of messages they receive (imposing or increasing Patron scores). It's also feasible that hunters could *lose* points in Patron as their connection falters. Or hunters' Background scores might remain the same, but the messages *change*. They become louder, more obvious, more persistent. The communication comes across more clearly or transmissions are garbled, meaning the messages are more inscrutable now than ever.

MINISTERS

The distinction between the Messengers and Ministers is uncertain. The terms are relative. The former

was invented by hunters online to hang some identifier on the force, persona or phenomenon that changed them. The latter was invented in game text to artificially differentiate between otherworldly forces and agents. (For a concrete explanation of these agencies and the game's tentative metaplot, see "Hunter: The Whole Story" on page 14 of the **Storytellers Handbook**.) For our purposes, the difference between Minister and Messenger is unimportant. No matter what they are, the beings behind hunters' imbuing are inscrutable. They're utterly unknowable beings from beyond space, time and rational mind. Are they angels? Extraterrestrials? Or are they the souls of ancient hunters and heroes trying to enact holy justice on an unjust world? Whatever the Ministers are as far as **Hunter** metaplot goes, they can be *anything* in your game. The question is how do you want to portray them? Do you even want to reveal their identity or does their unfathomable weirdness and distance serve your game just fine?

What's important is what the Powers That Be do at the end. They've foreseen these developments for a long time (hence the creation of hunters in the first place). So, what are they doing? How do they affect annihilation?

One significant possibility is that the Ministers sever their connection with hunters altogether. Perhaps they no longer need the assistance of the imbued at all — their goals at the end have been accomplished. Hunters have already made the impact that was hoped for, the these powers seek to wash their hands of the chosen. Or what if hunters have failed in their intended task, are taking too long or the end is happening too quickly. The Ministers come to fight their *own* battles as a result. Does the world suddenly see a proliferation of "angelic" or "alien" beings that come to Earth to clean the slate in a spate of *tabula rasa* destruction? Depending on your vision, the Ministers may not be heavenly at all, but hideous and terrible like the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, riding in on waves of fire and causing widespread devastation.

Of course, those options are severe and may be over the top for your game. Alternatively, the Ministers may "visit" individual (or all) hunters instead of relying on messages. These visitations can manifest as visions, hallucinations, or dreams. (For an example of possible Minister contact, see Chapter 2 of **Fall From Grace**.) Or maybe these entities possess hunters and make them high-Virtue extremists for a time. The Ministers may even gift characters with new and different capabilities to offset or survive Armageddon. The chosen could gain two extra Bruised health levels, or a hunter may be able to soak lethal damage when Conviction is expended to activate second sight. The Powers That Be may make impromptu modifications of the hunter "blueprint," observing the rule that desperate times call for desperate measures.

BYSTANDERS

One who flinches in the face of the imbuing can become a bystander, but even that fleeting glimpse of the truth eradicates a person's ignorance. "Duds" can attempt to live quiet, sheltered lives thereafter, but many fail. Over time, some bystanders may emerge as members of hunter circles, often as assistants but occasionally as leaders. What other hunters *do*, bystanders sometimes *attempt*. But with the last days, bystanders pose unique possibilities that the imbued may not.

SEVERING CONNECTIONS

One of your apocalyptic options, as suggested elsewhere, is severing the connection between the Messengers and the hunters. The end interferes with the hunter-Herald relationship, the powers revoke their blessings or the imbued are deemed no longer necessary and are left to contend on their own. This severance is also proposed in other chapters in this book; beings lose their connection to the source of their capabilities at the end of the world. If you decide to go that route for the denizens of your World of Darkness, it's recommended that hunters retain a thing or two.

Any derangements a hunter suffers due to his imbuing or high Virtue scores should remain. Such ailments are for all intents and purposes imprinted on his brain.

A hunter should retain access to second sight. Once a person has seen the truth, there's no closing that door again. Since Conviction is no longer needed to "fuel" hunters' lost powers, second sight can be handled in a couple different ways. You can decree that the sight always on. One of the chosen can't turn it off (a la Wayward). It always reveals monsters as wrong everywhere the imbued turn. The second option is to replace Conviction with Willpower to activate the sight. It's no longer a matter of tapping bestowed reserves to see monsters for what they are, but an act of inherent human determination.

While second sight can persist, hunters may no longer receive its associated protection against monsters' mind-, emotion- and fear-controlling powers. Activating second sight may reveal monsters for their true selves, but it no longer buffers the chosen from creatures' supernatural capabilities. You may allow a limited version of such resistance using Willpower, though. A hunter with his Herald connection eradicated may still have some strength to deny a monster's influence. You could allow a Willpower roll (difficulty 7 or higher) for a hunter to resist a creature's dominating effects.

Ultimately, edges, hunters' greatest powers, are gone. The chosen are left to their own devices and experiences when dealing with the other side.

These are terrible times. Existence itself is a struggle. Hunters, having struggled with monsters for potentially months or years before the end, bear the scars of their battles. They show the signs of stress and injury and begin to crack physically and mentally. The end of the world may be too much for some of them to bear and they snap altogether. That can make hunters a dangerous, unpredictable lot. Bystanders, on the other hand, don't have quite the same problems. Where logic and rationality can abandon the imbued, bystanders can take them up. People who know about monsters' existence can become the voice of reason among shaken and scattered hunters, giving the chosen purpose and goals on which to focus at this, the worst of all times.

Assuming monsters don't openly do battle in the streets, humanity at large may still need to be shown the truth in the last days. Bystanders could be the agents who go among the masses, revealing events and showing individuals for what they are. Bystanders could also be charged with organizing informed people into a revolutionary force, and be better at it than the imbued. Hunters may think of themselves as human, but the trials they have faced may have distanced them from their former mindsets. The chosen might not have the patience or sanity to educate ordinary folks gradually, in a manner that they can digest. And in the end times, hunters' potentially flaring powers and otherworldly contact could certainly put their humanity in question. Bystanders can therefore bring the message to the masses, human to human.

It's also possible that you just want to show bystanders to have had an important role after all, perhaps foreseen or intended by the Heralds. Before the end, the majority of bystanders remained on the sidelines of the hunt. Now they may organize. They may go to battle with the chosen or form their own circles who assume roles and fill holes that hunters cannot. They can spread information, provide support to wounded chosen, ground the imbued who teeter on madness, and exemplify what ordinary people are capable of.

There are other, more... extreme options, as well. Consider what might happen if all bystanders are given something of a "second chance." Perhaps they're allowed to turn and face the truth and become full-fledged hunters. Or perhaps they aren't given the choice and are simply forced into a second imbuing, one they're *unable* to deny. If this last case, how is their creed determined? Are they oddly without creed, able to assume any combination of virtues and Edges? Or maybe they're not miraculously "promoted" after all, but given limited access to a few hunter powers. Perhaps they gain second sight or a single dot in a single creed path. It's even possible that bystanders do not become hunters, but raw conduits for information sent directly from the Messengers. What happens if bystanders lose all sense of self and identity and their personalities are subsumed by one

personality from beyond? What happens when bystanders summarily lose their humanity?

MONSTERS

Without monsters there would be no imbued. Men and women are chosen for the sole purpose of dealing with creatures by one means or another. But at the end of the world, what are monsters doing and how might hunters get involved to stop the beings? The following are ideas for creature activity in the end times, whether as direct contribution to annihilation or as a result of it. Principle antagonists in your chronicle may have very specific agendas for themselves and the imbued. Or they have particular goals based on the Armageddon scenario you choose from those proposed earlier in this chapter. Other creatures may make their own final bids or exult in the end in their own personal ways.

SPIRITS AND WALKING DEAD

Ghosts and zombies are intrinsically related. After all, most members of the walking dead are little more than ghosts trapped in sacks of animated meat. The end times are sure to send reverberations throughout the spirit world. Indeed, the recent influx of dead into the lands of living (which also signaled the emergence of the imbued) may have been a sign of the end. Do spirits look forward to and help shepherd the end times, seeking to bolster their armies with fallen spirits? Or does the final reckoning mean that even the dead will be judged and sent screaming into the void?

There are other spirit matters to consider, too. For instance, is the spirit world summarily destroyed? Does that cataclysm send all ghosts across the membrane separating realities, anchoring them firmly in the living world? Do ghosts *all* get thrown into rotting corpses, making zombie armies rise from the grave? Do ghosts stand a chance for salvation or are they beyond deliverance?

What is the hunter reaction to such activity? A potential flood of ghosts and walking dead — even compared to what the imbued have known — may distract hunters from the big issue. It's hard to help stave off cataclysm when a character can't even drive into town without being swarmed by the walking dead.

Zealots may respond fanatically to a flood of spirits, putting down offenders and guarding the living. Spirits may have been a concern for the Merciful before; many ghosts may have seemed like little more than regular people denied their final resting place. But now the forgiving have their hands full with a new proliferation of spirits. Visionaries could use the chaos caused by a flood of ghosts as cover to stage operations against other monsters. Visionaries might also gain information from spirits, whether about what's going on in the spirit world or about the impending fate of all possible worlds.

Stranger still, what does it mean if spirits and zombies don't proliferate at the end, but disappear altogether? They

go from hunters' most common antagonists to nonexistent. Do the chosen mistakenly consider this absence a triumph? Or do they see it as the bad omen it is? Are even the dead able to die? Worse, did *something* destroy them, something far worse than the very menace of the living dead?

VAMPIRES

The last days are chaos incarnate. Do bloodsuckers take advantage of it or are they punished by it? At this time, an offense such as forcing oneself on someone and drinking his blood may go unnoticed against the backdrop of social and physical upheaval. Why care about a few exsanguinated bodies when an earthquake just decimated the whole town? Vampires can capitalize on such disorder and grow fat on the blood of the defenseless. But it could go the other way. Times of such discord are cause for heightened alert and security. A city or country may invoke a form of martial law and have the military (or at least vigilant police) on every street corner. An 8 PM curfew makes it hard for a leech to go out in public and find blood.

Other questions arise, too. Do vampires reveal themselves to the mortal masses, dropping any pretense of secrecy? Or do they have to remain hidden, avoiding the mobs that fill the streets in search of the cause of society failure?

Most important, how can hunters respond to vampire activity? Rather than react to bloodsuckers' tactics, hunters could be proactive and take advantage of the chaos to deal with their enemies. They may attack vampire havens or

interests (corporations, warehouses) under the guise of "looting" or "terrorism." Alternately, hunters may see this as a time to build bridges. The Merciful may save vampires from angry mobs, and Visionary hunters may recruit the undead for information — or be recruited by vampires to get close to other monstrous targets.

SHAPECHANGERS

Most shifters exist apart from or on the fringes of human society. Many have also predicted — and feared — a global Apocalypse. So, how do they react when it's here? And what can hunters do to counteract or facilitate shapechangers' actions?

Do changers enter mainstream society? Do they declare war on humans, hoping to remove them from the world so as to truly save it? Or do the creatures hope to announce their existence to ask for — or demand — cooperation in salvaging reality? Some shapechangers (be they werewolves, ratmen or cat-changers) may decide to damn it all and attempt to hasten coming doom rather than allay it, in search of a clean break.

Do hunters attempt to stem the tide of beastmen with violence? Do they see these aberrations and decide that the monsters have brought about the last days? Or is it possible that the two could form a tenuous alliance? Both consider themselves protectors of the world, at least more so than many denizens of the world do. Hunters have some domain over protecting people, and werewolves have some domain



overprotecting wild places. Would this commonality allow an alliance? If so, how long is it before such an alliance breaks down with members on one or both sides dead? Regardless of Armageddon, shapechangers are still monsters in many hunters' eyes. Do imbued take this "fact" as evidence that no alliance can work? Perhaps Zealots seek out all shifters' sacred places and raze them to the ground, leaving the monsters little inspiration with which to charge their powers. Visionaries could hold such "holy" places hostage in an effort to negotiate some kind of deal with werewolves. And the Merciful could seek out these monsters to turn them away from their bestial ways in this dark time, or to seek out information on the last days from a wholly different perspective.

WITCHES

What could Armageddon spell for manipulators? Many witches seek out global "ascension," which involves the masses suddenly awaking with belief and acceptance that reality is utterly flexible. Do these last days provide mages with that possibility? Can they open collective human consciousness? Does cataclysm blast open the doors of perception for every human being? Would such awareness allow people to see monsters for what they are and free hunters to operate openly? Could public understanding leave monsters exposed and vulnerable, making wizardly and hunter goals akin at the end of the world?

It could go the opposite way, too. The end may clamp down on such free beliefs with fear and deprivation. In this case, do mages lose all hope? Do they go mad? Perhaps they lose control of their magic or are denied it altogether.

Manipulators are a rare encounter for any hunter, as their numbers are significantly smaller and better hidden than most monsters. Yet, Armageddon may draw them out like roaches. The limits on their magic may be lifted, allowing them to perform whatever miracles or abuses they like, which cannot be overlooked or missed. Or if mages make a bid for widespread awareness, do they play their hand and expose themselves to hunter attention?

How do hunters react to mages who make their existence known, whether to all of humanity or to imbued eyes only? Do Zealots recognize a sudden emergence of witches and decide that magicians' dabbling triggers the end? Do the Merciful see manipulators as prospective allies or as "cultists" in need of "deprogramming"? Visionaries may consider an increase in mage encounters a critical connection to the end times and seek out magicians for information, whether on how to change the world or how to stop what other wizards have in store.

Ultimately, if previously ordinary people start awakening into magical powers, how do hunters respond? Is the phenomenon indicative of the plague of monsters that rises out of Armageddon? Or are these newly made mages friends, enemies or something to watch from a distance? What if hunters' friends or loved ones awaken?

Manipulators, often obsessed with their own personal agendas, can be ignorant of the goings on of much of the rest of the world. But their magic gives them an opportunity not afforded to some other supernatural beings. It can allow them to perceive things that others can't, if they take the time to look, and that might include hunters' existence. A few mages suspect that the chosen exist, though they have guessed incorrectly about imbued identity, assuming that hunters are little more than creatures' puppets. With the end times, do warlocks become more aggressive toward hunters? Perhaps they see the imbued much as hunters may see them, as a possible key to understanding the last days. Is it possible that manipulators capture hunters for information or are able to mask their presence among the imbued for a time? Could mages actively decipher the hunter code? If any of this happens, decide whether manipulators make hunters friends or foes. Or worse, do mages see them as pawns? Is it possible that mages think hunters are a phenomenon of mass-awakened humanity, of people becoming magicians, a sign that ascension has begun? Does such mistaken identity help or harm relations between wizards and hunters in the final days?

DEMONS

It's possible that hunters were created with the task of stemming the tide of demons ready to be freed from their prison. Some theories hold that hunters may have been a "pre-emptive strike" against the coming infernal. Demons are a personification of the end times. Their very existence could imply that the thread holding the tapestry of reality together is quickly unraveling.

What role to demons take in Armageddon? Is this the ruin they've sought for ages? Do they stalk the streets openly displaying their natures, demanding belief from cowering mortals? It could be that the end is an obstacle to their individual bids for power. After all, if humanity dies, who will worship them? Do demons rally *against* the coming end in an effort to keep some scrap of humanity alive (and enslaved)?

If hunters are the antithesis of demons, they could be called to action by the Messengers or by their own need to act. But what form does that action take? Zealots may sniff out the trails of the infernal, putting demons (and their cultists) to the torch. The Zealous might also keep mortals close, in an effort to protect people and to have the support of an army. The Merciful may seek to undo much of what demons accomplish. They might search for demonic slaves or worshippers and attempt to "show them the error of their ways." Particularly brave or compassionate Merciful might attempt to salve the souls of demons themselves, drawing them out of their tormented furies and into some kind of reconciliatory light. Visionaries may take note that there is at least *some* connection between the sudden emergence of demons and the signal of annihilation. Do these hunters search heretical texts to find some way to stave off the end by using demons? Do

they try to find the infernal and remind them of the divine path, hopefully saving the world in the process?

Demons and hunters also share a special relationship. The damned can ostensibly tempt hunters, leading obsessed, lost or broken imbued down a dark path, enticing them with undreamed of achievements or forbidden power (possibly in the form of level-five edges). Typically, demons can deliver the height of power only to chosen who have reached 10 in their primary Virtues. During these last days, however, it's possible that devils can share such power to hunters of *any* caliber. Do many hunters accept demonic offers in hopes of doing good? Is there a sudden proliferation of infernal chosen, making life difficult for other imbued *and* for demons who oppose their masters? For more information on playing and portraying infernal chosen (and their other extremist kin), see **Hunter: Fall from Grace**.

HUNTERS

Hunters are driven by their individual personalities, first and foremost, but secondary are their Virtues and creeds. The imbued are people, yet their very outlooks and predilections establish guidelines and suggestions for how they react to monsters and cope with the hunt. Creeds and Virtues derive from such identity and can be used to estimate how a hunter might think and behave. Someone might be foresightful, suggesting Vision, or dedicated to protecting friends, suggesting Defense, or if she is predominantly hopeful and good-willed, she could be an Innocent.

So what general roles do hunters of different Virtues and creeds assume at the end of the world? Do they remain individuals working separately from each other, or can they find some common ground and cause? Can they set their differences aside or are their seemingly insurmountable differences part of some grand plan? Do Zealots stand in the way of the Merciful at every turn, and is that how the Visionaries want it? Here are a few ideas on what hunters of the three Virtues may do during the last days.

MERCIFUL

While the Merciful can pursue any agendas that are important to them individually, the Messengers generally choose them with a common goal in mind: To heal the world. To alleviate the pain and suffering inflicted and felt by monsters. By accomplishing these humanitarian feats, the Merciful might mitigate the sins of this world and allow for a new, pure one.

In the end times, the Merciful are plagued by two problems. They're needed now more than ever. The world is falling apart, monsters are rampant, and justice and compassion are endangered. Their ministrations seem required at every turn, to help this person, to alleviate that being. How does one do greater good when so many smaller — yet no less important — acts of charity are required?

The second problem is that the Merciful must ask themselves, “*Am I doing any good at all?*” When the

world is going to shit, it's hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Do small or large sacrifices, pardons or reassurances mean squat? Does each act matter in itself or will it all come to naught?

The Merciful have a hard road, one that may lead to the other side of destruction. But helplessness, depression and futility are distractions from that path. Can the Merciful heed the call and do what needs to be done despite mounting oppression and cynicism? Or do they falter and allow other imbued to dominate the “war,” relegating the Merciful to little more than supporting rather than guiding roles?

Redeemers sense that *something* has to be done. They can't usually sit idly by; their personalities and capabilities tend to motivate them to help at every turn. Such calling certainly makes them needed. Humans get hurt, monsters go mad and others hunters exhaust themselves and their resources. Redeemers are there to help, rejuvenate and forgive. But does their mission demand too high a price? Those on the path of Redemption may become obsessed with saving everyone. Everywhere they look is pain, loss and suffering. The inability to save everyone may drive Redeemers to dangerous lengths. They may over-extend themselves or fall to addictions such as drugs to stay awake or to numb their pain. It's also possible that they could go insane through a messianic complex. They may believe themselves divinely inspired “saviors,” placing themselves at the center of their own mythology and religion that must save the world.

A group almost bound to push itself too far, too fast is the Martyrs. These hunters have no shortage of demand (especially in their own minds) during the end. They may take on any mission, from getting food to a group of hungry children to strapping C4 to their bellies and walking into a penthouse filled with vampires. But at what cost? Martyrs can go beyond the distance, resisting the need for sleep, sustenance and shelter. But can they have long-term usefulness in the last days if they manage to restrain any self-destructive tendencies? Why would they preserve or pace themselves? The clock is ticking and there's little time left. With little to lose except a chance to maybe make a bigger sacrifice tomorrow, what holds these masochistic hunters back today? And what happens when a Martyr starts to *appreciate* the end of the world and his place in it? Could a hunter of this stripe actively work to oppose *too* much good so he can fully embrace his calling in this dark time?

Innocents may be able to see some good at the end, at least in theory. While not necessarily eternal optimists, many believers cling to the hope that *something* watches out for the world. If they can honor and share that belief, maybe there will be a reward after so much tribulation. (And if not, isn't making the final days better reward in itself?) Innocents can assuage people's fears and offset the erratic, angry behavior of some monsters. A vampire may be lost in temporary madness, caught in the throes of fear

and dread, and an Innocent could help the being resist its destructive instinct. The hopeful can also be useful in information-gathering and performing thankless tasks due to a willingness to go places few else will and to trust those whom others refuse to.

One of the traps an Innocent needs to beware is guilt. Other hunters might make tangible differences — protecting a group of people at a boarded-up store, or saving a child-like monster from itself. But Innocents tend to proceed with intangible proof of their worth. The value of their efforts may be questioned by themselves and others. What happens when believers decide that their own contribution is meaningless? Do they exile themselves? Or what happens when an Innocent believes herself the very model of compassion and temperance? Does she become dictatorial, attempting to force the masses into a peaceful next world?

VISIONARIES

Are those of the Vision Virtue — specifically Visionaries — truly meant to be leaders? Or scholars? Or strategists? Or are they simply insane people unraveling enigmas with little idea as to how or why? The Ministers ostensibly have a mission for hunters of this creed, and it relates directly to the end. They are intended to uncover means of saving (or more appropriately, surviving and rebuilding) the world, and to lead others to such solutions. It can seem as if these seers are made for times like these. They are often chosen for their curiosity, drive, foresight and imagination. They can study monsters and pick apart the causes and effects of the end times. These dark days call for answers and Visionaries might provide them.

But metaplot aside, Visionaries can fill any number of niches in your game. They can be hoarse-throated doomsayers walking the streets, screaming their prophecies to anyone who will listen. They might be investigators acting in the shadows, secretly researching (through books, monsters or dreams) the path destruction might take and how best to stop (or encourage) it. They could be strategists for other hunters, sketching a blueprint for success. Or they could be the generals of the chosen, marshaling the forces of the imbued community, rallying them to battle against the inhuman denizens of the world. The clarity and focus that these imbued often possess can give direction to disparate hunters, allowing all to work toward some goal before time runs out.

Other options exist for Visionaries, though. They may be treated with special care or given unique gifts because of their roles. Perhaps they gain enlightenment that other creeds do not. They may be bestowed new edges or simply a greater wealth of “direct” communication with the Heralds. Unfortunately, it’s also possible that these hunters endure more and more derangements as the price of their “insight.” How much is too much to pay for the sake of wisdom and the world?

(For discussion of Hermits and Waywards, see “Extremists,” below.)

ZEALOTS

Sometimes forgiveness isn’t enough. A rot strong enough to smash through a brick wall and with a taste for the flesh of children is beyond clemency. Prophetic insight has its place, but it can just as easily tell a hunter what he already knows: “This monster is beyond help and will kill again given half a chance.” Thus, members of the Zealous creeds tend to find their purpose. These are people of action. To them, the only way to “save” an evil thing might be with a shotgun. The only way to “learn” about it is to demand answers under the knife. And that is what the Ministers intend for the Zealous. The world might be saved only through purification — cleansing fires — and destroying monsters could sanctify reality. At Armageddon, such purity may be needed most.

There’s no end to Zealots’ “task.” Monsters undoubtedly smell the last days on the wind just like everyone else. Sensing their own demise, there’s the fear that creatures will intensify their abuses of humanity — whether out of spite, hunger or sheer panic. How do Zealots respond or try to counteract the enemy? Do they continue on as they always have, merely maintaining their vigilance? Do they gather with various other hunters to create a well-balanced force of reckoning? Or do they perceive the charitable and curious behavior of other chosen as misplaced in this time of tragedy, eschewing imbued who don’t see things their way? But then, of course, not even the Zealous form a unified front. No single course may appeal to them all, so is even purification enough to unite these imbued?

Avengers may assemble cults of personality, perhaps comprised of other hunters, but it’s possible that normal people heed the summons in this apocalyptic age. The vengeful may point to religious evidence (Book of Revelations, the Koran) to “prove” the righteousness of their call to arms. Do Avengers endorse extreme violence, engaging in and encouraging wanton destruction (as opposed to the calculated levels of devastation aimed for by Waywards)? Or is it possible that an Avenger’s faith in his “crusade” falters with the end?

Many Defenders may do what they’ve always done, only ever more intently. They can hole people (including friends and family) up in safe and remote locations to “weather the storm.” Some protectors may attempt to save humanity from the depredations of monsters and other hunters, fearing that something must be saved before all is lost. Guardians’ “line of defense” can be drawn anywhere — at a door, a city block or at a town’s limits. If the time comes that a safe house is violated, these hunters assume responsibility for leading the their charges to new, safer places elsewhere. Defenders are anchors against the storm, but their value assumes something will survive to see the next day’s calm.

Judges may find their impartiality useful in deciding which monsters, hunters and people are

worthwhile in the madness of the end. They can decide what must be saved and what must be tossed overboard in order to remain afloat. They can make the split-second decisions that mean life or death, moment to moment. But what happens when these decision-makers go too far? Do they form cults based on their own megalomania? Do they become jury and executioner, too, taking their brand of condemnation to the undeserving? Or do they judge themselves too harshly and are left ineffective and indecisive when others need them most?

EXTREMISTS

When the shit hits the fan, hunters undoubtedly want everyone to stand together. But with the extremists of the imbued community, that's just not going to happen. Extremists aren't just a downside of the hunter phenomenon. They're tormented, obsessed and insane imbued given license to exist and carry out their severe tactics. The Messengers still communicate with them, and even allow them to be. Surely they fit into the scheme of things somehow. The roles of individual extremist "types" are important to consider, at the end times more so than ever. Not only are there Waywards and Hermits, but high-Virtue (and compromised) chosen who endanger monsters, other hunters and regular people.

Waywards are capable of carrying out intricate plots of deliberate devastation in an effort to harm monsters. To them, Armageddon is a *grand guignol* of possibility. Creatures are everywhere, and Waywards couldn't turn off their sight even if they wanted to. Do these people finally marshal the troops as was their original intent? Maybe world devastation is a sufficiently desperate situation to warrant other hunters to follow a Wayward lead. Perhaps God45 and Peleus assemble a small army of other extremists and carry out brutal attacks on monstrous holdings everywhere.

Whether Waywards act as leaders or contributors to (or obstacles of) movements doesn't change the fact that they're utterly dangerous. They're capable of amassing and acting on terrible knowledge of destruction. What happens when one of these crazies discovers how to make a bomb like the one used in Oklahoma City? Or if they use bio-terror tactics and drive a garbage truck full of small-pox-laden



corpses into the Mall of America? Waywards — and all extremists — are wild cards that you can play in your story to make sure *nothing* goes predictably.

Hermits, too, must have a place in the end. They have an intense connection to the Messengers, but it's usually incoherent babble. What happens if the constant messages start making sense? Do Hermits become prophets among hunters, delivering the "truth" to any and all who will listen? Waywards may stand in the way of other hunters with their violent designs. Hermits may also stand in the way, but in a different manner. Possibly believing themselves the mouthpieces of the Heralds, Hermits may disrupt other hunters' efforts when they go against the "plan" (which potentially exists only in an intruder's mind). If a group of imbued is about to sneak into a slave-labor camp and a Hermit sees the act as contrary to Messenger desires, he may purposefully blow the hunters' cover.

What happens if the limitations on a Hermit's proximity to hunters and monsters suddenly disappear? With that barrier gone, these extremists could become an active part of hunter society. Their edges allow them access to unforeseen places, except now there would be no static stopping them from leading allies into the fray. Hermits can be excellent strategists, except now they don't have to guide efforts from afar. Yet, old habits die hard. They may be relieved of the static but *choose* to remain aloof, and need to be drawn out of their shells by other desperate imbued.

Hunters of any creed with high Virtue become extremists, and are certain to have a role in the last days. These chosen can go supernova; burning hot and fast, and dying not long after "accepting" a mission. They might not be so disposable during the end times, however. Allies might try to keep them grounded so as to continue with the effort and bring the agents' considerable powers to bear. Or such obsessive hunters may now see new opportunities, setting themselves up as emperors of the imbued or are called to abusive and deranged duties never imagined before. These hunters can be in the grip of their own madness or be direct pawns of the Heralds or demons, so they cannot be taken lightly. What happens when one or more are loosed on the streets and actually achieve some kind of organization? Could they help destroy a corrupt government infrastructure, or do they seek to replace it? Do they act with singular purpose, or have they lost all purpose and need to be taken out before they hurt those who need to be saved? Extremists' sometimes brutal tactics may be used or directed to do good at the end times, destroying or rescuing monsters or people, but these deranged hunters often run the risk of becoming monsters themselves.

Perhaps extremists aren't just a threat to players' characters, but *are* players' characters. They may be players' long-standing hunters finally driven over the edge at the

end, or you might have players assume the roles of these imbued to experience them when the world falls apart.

Hunter: Fall from Grace explores the goals and motivations of various kinds of extremists, as do **Hunter Book: Hermit** and **Wayward**. It's important to decide what such unusual characters seek to accomplish at the end, and the means by which they're willing to achieve it. It may be that such extremity is exactly what the end demands, and no "lesser" hunters can hope to cleanse, heal or find an alternative to the world we've always know.

MORTALS

There are six billion people on Earth. Humanity has unwittingly had a relationship with monsters for its entire existence. People are food for vampires, breeding stock for skinshifters, playthings for manipulators, sources of passion for spirits, and worshippers for the infernal. And yet, mankind has remained ignorant of the abuses that it's suffered. We've been kept confused and ignorant, always left to wonder why a little voice warns us to be afraid of the dark. With the end times here, does humanity's place change?

Now is the ideal time to shatter mankind's ignorance of monsters. Any mystical veil keeping people deaf and dumb may simply collapse, allowing the masses to see creatures for what they are. (This wouldn't be the same thing as hunters' second sight, but people would no longer forget or rationalize seeing a man change into a wolf. They would remember it in terrifying detail.) This revelation might allow hunters to rally people to their cause. The outrage and revulsion experienced by the masses could be harnessed and turned against the supernatural. But it could backfire, too. Fearful (or enterprising) folks, always afflicted with self-interest, may side with monsters in an effort to pick the winning "team." What can hunters do when regular people, untouched by monstrous taint, stand in the way of their goals? Can regular folks be spared or do they need to become casualties of war?

Or you may have the masses remain in complete ignorance of the truth. Mankind's long-standing blindness may be resilient, even when monsters and hunters act openly. The supernatural veil may keep people blind or they may subconsciously refuse to see what goes on before them. The world is falling apart, but in "understandable" terms — earthquakes, civil strife, war. It's certainly not due to "monsters." It could be that creatures still operate in the shadows. They conduct annihilation unseen, except by the imbued. If monsters fear that warring in the streets may cause the human herd to rise up and destroy them, beasts may continue their secret maneuvers, now intended to save themselves at the end or to emerge as the new powers that be. And then, there's a certain comfort and confidence that comes in pulling puppet-strings from behind the scenes. Some monsters have done it for so long they know no other existence and can't help themselves now, even

when their doom is imminent. The result is a humanity that unwittingly remains controlled up till the last.

INTERPRETATION

For those gifted (or paranoid) enough to see them, there are hints of the impending end in all things. In the books of the Bible, the patterns of birds in the sky, in the headline bar on CNN. Armageddon is coming, foreshadowed through secret warnings and premonitions. As Storyteller, you may want to use such tools as the Book of Revelations or Fyodor's *Apocrypha* as evidence for characters that the last days have truly arrived. Application of these interpretive signs gives an apocalyptic chronicle weight. Instead of being some random, haphazard affair, the end feels like something that's been planned by a calculating hand and has culminated for ages.

Hunters (those of Vision creeds in particular) may seek out such prophecy and portent in hopes of understanding and averting the end. Those without the background or access may not be interested in the signs of literature, but may build theories based on news reports, public trends or urban legends. At first, these omens may not seem too serious, at least until *they start coming true*.

For some ideas on how these signs and portents can emerge and develop in-character, refer to the reports, emails and letters that appear at the beginning of this chapter. By all means, let players read these artifacts, whether all at once or piecemeal as the end comes to a head. The items can even be handed out as in-game props seen by characters. Suggestions for more signs and ways to handle them are presented here.

PROPHECIES

"Apocalyptic Literature" is a style of writing that began with the Bible and that has branched into practically every realm of the written word. Books such as Daniel, Ezekiel and the mother of all apocalyptic literature, Revelation, are all commonly used to "prove" that the end times are either swift approaching or have been upon us for years. Of course, the Bible isn't the only source that can authenticate Judgment Day. Countless non-canonical texts are not included in the Bible. The Book of Enoch, for example, details angelic prophecy about the start and end of the world. Outside Christianity, look at Viking myth for Ragnarok, in which all the gods and monsters come together in a cosmic conflict. The Koran provides Muslims with evidence of the end. Even the Aztecs had detailed calendars that plotted the end down to the tiniest detail.

You could intentionally place imagery from any or all of these prophetic texts in your game. It's possible that characters draw such parallels without your intervention. Whether you mean for prophecies to be legitimate or hoaxes, it's important to nail down what some of them *could* mean. Is the innocent "lamb" conquering the beast in the Book of Revelation actually

Jesus Christ? Or could it be hunters? Or humans succeeding where hunters fail? Are the angels "pouring wrath" upon the world actually the Messengers or hunters themselves? Revelation mentions the Great Harlot, the Dragon and the Antichrist. Are these figures prominent monsters in the world? They could be an ancient vampire, a powerful demon and a primeval spirit.

The Koran posits several signs indicating the end: moral and social decay, natural disasters and cruel politics. (Sound familiar?) The Koran also states that an evil tempter similar to the Antichrist, called the *Dajjal*, will emerge. This dark lord will be defeated by the *Mahdi*, a messianic figure sometimes believed to be Jesus, other times believed to be a "holy warrior" of Islam. Could this figure be a hunter?

It's also possible that all of this is complete and total bunk and has little relevance to the actual occurrences of your game. Just understand that some hunters certainly believe it all and are on the lookout for such portents. The characters in your game may not be millennialists, but they may run afoul of such people. Do these prophets seem opposed to the coming end, or perhaps agents of its arrival?

What else can literary "signs" mean for hunters? Apocalypticism parades the belief that during the last days, good and evil will do battle and the Creator will intervene to wipe the slate clean and usher the moral masses into a new age. Those who are allowed passage into this new world will be the "elect," and all else will be base, vile sinners. What do hunters think? Do they believe they are the moral agents of good doing battle against evil (i.e., monsters)? Or do they see themselves as sinners just trying to make the world better for others? Their attitudes may inspire a messianic complex or motivate them to become self-sacrificial. So, are these prophecies capable of giving hunters hope when all else is dark? That somehow these texts imply there's something worth striving for when all else seems lost?

FYODOR'S APOCRYPHA

The Visionary Fyodor is responsible for the rambling collection of prophetic musings typically called *Apocrypha*. The Hermit Violin99 is responsible for putting the collection together and disseminating it to the general hunter population. The haphazardly termed "book" reads like a lunatic's rumination on what it means to be chosen, what the history of the imbued *might* be, and where the future of the world could lead. It's this last part that's potentially important to your game.

Fyodor describes many scenarios — both beginning and end — that could come to pass in an apocalyptic chronicle. A character with a copy of the book could interpret just about any occurrence in the last days as applicable to the warnings in the text, no matter how coincidental or damning the comparison. You, as Storyteller, may want to orchestrate events that match the

prophecies. Do you follow Fyodor's events to the letter, making them fairly obvious? Do you allow the events to occur but disguise them behind metaphor and musing? Do you invoke one or two events but allow the rest to fall to the wayside, leaving hunters confused about what could happen next? What events from the book happen, and how do you present them in-game?

Corruption of the Imbued. Fyodor speculates heavily on the infernal (and potentially other) corruption of hunters. He cites that the chosen will receive offers of "help, support, money or the capacity to perform miracles." Should they accept such gifts, they will be made stronger, but yet more help will be needed. A hunter seeking such gifts walks a slippery slope and falls to demonic corruption. Fyodor suggests that over time, hunters will become suspicious of one another because many will be corrupted. Hunters will kill hunters. He writes, "The darkness will own us, body and soul, and set us on an insane quest to slaughter our own, always making us suspicious of the ones who are pure." Once the darkness knows of the imbued and corrupts them, how evil can hunters become? Is it possible that the monsters aren't really the cause of Armageddon, but the chosen trigger it?

Fyodor's First Sign. He writes of five signs building up to the end. Violin99's notes speculate that the first sign occurred when JFK Jr.'s plane went down. But that needn't be the case in your game; Violin99 could be way off the mark. The first sign may not have happened yet. It details the striking down of the son of a Golden King of the New World. The New World may mean the Americas, but what favored son could die and "rob the world of a spark of hope that could have helped keep it alive"? Is there a person in your game — a prominent politician's son or the son of a beloved movie star — who could die horribly and disquiet the world? Or could the "son" be a metaphor? Perhaps it's a corporation owned by a bigger one, and when the corporation folds ("struck down"), millions of jobs are lost and the economy takes a plunge.

Fyodor's Second Sign. The Visionary points to "the root of all evil" coming together in the "lands that gave it birth," and this union threatens world balance. And when this equilibrium is threatened, evil can take hold. Violin99 believes that a coalition of creatures could take hold of the area of the Golden Age (Egypt, Mesopotamia). The cradle of civilization would seem to be the Middle East, although you may have the "root of all evil" birthed in another place. Maybe the dark depths of Lake Vostok, Africa or even in America. Does the sign imply that monsters will rule? Or could it be that this "union" will bind human nations, not monstrous ones? A federation of terrorist forces, perhaps, or some combination of dictatorships bent on bringing the world to its knees? Or could this union be a merger of corporations that seeks to exploit the world's natural resources and cause Mother Nature to rear up and destroy her children?

Fyodor's Third Sign. Based on the line, "Mother Nature will turn her head from humanity and her cup will run dry," Violin hypothesizes that a drought will strike Africa. But there's nothing to say this drought has to be limited to Africa, or even occur there at all. A major drought across Europe, China or America could cause massive problems — more so than in Africa, where such phenomena are somewhat more commonplace. Fyodor speculates that hunger and desperation will cause death and suffering (and the demise of "good warriors," presumably meaning hunters). Is this even a drought? Does it simply stop raining/snowing across the world? Or does nature turn from humanity and no longer afford mankind her protection? The natural world could simply go mad — storms, earthquakes, blizzards, extinctions. Does nature's madness translate over to *humanity's* madness? What can hunters do? Will monsters take over amid the chaos?

Fyodor's Fourth Sign. Here, Fyodor writes that "Mighty Jupiter will stretch forth his hand and with a single casual blow of his hammer he will obliterate the city at the foot of the world." Millions die. What can this mean? Violin99 suggests a natural disaster in a major city. What city lies at the "foot of the world"? Does this mean the bottom of the world? Perhaps somewhere in Australia, South America or South Africa. Or maybe the phrase implies the age of a city or civilization. Could Calcutta, Cairo, Beijing or Baghdad be old enough to be the target? What form does the destruction take? Jupiter was Zeus, which could imply "death from above." Meteors are sometimes referred to as "hammers" of the sky or God. But Jupiter's mythological hammer represented thunder and lightning, and he was considered a storm god. Could a horrible storm raze or drown an entire city? Does Jupiter being a Roman god imply that the city to fall will be Rome?

Fyodor's Final Sign. The events of the fifth sign may take place in the course of a single day or night. ("In the time it takes for the sun to travel the sky.") Darkness falls after "three of the brightest jewels in the crown of the Earth" perish. Violin99 posits that this could be a triple-assassination, perhaps of world leaders or even of three of the greatest imbued. Okay, but who? Are there three chosen who have taken the lead in your chronicle whose deaths could count toward such prophecy? Maybe three prominent figures (philanthropists, humanitarians, scientists) are snuffed out. Or maybe the three "jewels" aren't humans at all.

Consider that earlier, Fyodor states three places (the plain of Gizeh, the Cambodian temple complex of Angkor Wat, and the Nazca desert drawings) are the "sacred keystones" in the "crown of power" that keep the darkness imprisoned. Could he mean that these three places are destroyed, which blows the doors off some jail keeping the most ancient and evil monsters from the world? What could destroy these places? Nuclear war? A meteor strike? Or could it be as simple as tourism or industry tarnishing their purity?

Miscellaneous. These signs are not the only portents available to your cataclysmic chronicle. Fyodor offers prophecy throughout *Apocrypha*. He receives several visions from shadowy figures — a man with an opal ring and a woman with a ruby one. These dreams are increasingly obscure and potentially mired in metaphor. What is the wooden boat with the golden crucifix? Perhaps treasure-hunters “find” the original and complete Cross of Christ. What about the city that rises out of death from the sands of the empty desert? Is this a city of ghosts, or simply an archeological find of some prominence (one that has secret treasures foretelling the end or that triggers an ancient plague)? Does Fyodor’s description of the Golden Age suggest a potential future for the shattered world? Or do ancestral memories of that time flood the minds of all hunters, giving them a new reason to fight — and a new reason to remain pure in the face of all-consuming corruption?

SCIENCE

Science, whether it means to or not, does a lot of doomsaying. For every article or pronouncement that researchers work toward a new drug or cure, there’s a declaration that a meteor is heading toward Earth, that a new form of pneumonia spreads like wildfire, or that no country in the world is prepared for a biological or chemical attack. Science, in conjunction with mass media, constantly predicts our demise with what would appear to be hard evidence. This isn’t some guy on an island spouting off about a Great Dragon trying to seduce the moral majority. These are presumably erudite, academic individuals who hold “truth” in their hands. The question is, can you use this kind of fatalism in your end chronicle?

Science is more or less the new global religion. Everybody pays attention to it, whether they want to or not — hunters included. You can use science to play on characters’ paranoia and to foster vague predictions about the last days. Take, for example, a lot of the articles about close calls the Earth has with passing asteroids. We all have a little fear in our hearts that one day a near-miss is going to be a big-hit and a chunk of space rock is going to plummet into us. You can saturate the media with this kind of talk, and then one day grimly announce that CNN has learned of a collision course. Hunters who look through a telescope could even see the little red light in the sky that’s supposed to be the asteroid. Armageddon can then be triggered by panicked people and monsters, whether the reports of the rock are genuine or not.

Then again, you don’t need to resort to such drastic scientific proclamations. An intensification of “weird” stories on the news might do the trick. You can use real-world examples such as the strange half-extinction of honeybees a few years ago, outbreaks of weird diseases like hantavirus or cholera, or an increase in shark attacks. You can also make stuff up. What if birds start acting weird, attacking people like in Hitchcock’s film? What if a prominent constellation such as Orion just up and disappears



from the sky? What happens when dolphins go extinct, a new communicable disease is discovered or crops across the Midwest are inexplicably wiped out? All of these things, which arguably have scientific explanations, offer foreshadowing. You can use these events as imagery to imply the coming end, or you can have such tragedies occur *during* Armageddon as a sign that things have really gone wrong.

OMENS AND PORTENTS

Indications of the end aren't decided by written prophecy or science alone. They're also inspired by superstition, perhaps passed culturally like urban legends. A simple omen, one most everyone knows, is it's bad luck for a black cat to cross your path. The message is simple, direct and somewhat foreboding. These kinds of ill-fated occurrences can pepper your game before Armageddon begins, and continue to happen thereafter.

Signs pointing to the last days could involve anything: a blood-red moon, a drastic increase in crime rate, a funny taste to the water. And don't be afraid to make it personal, going so far as to encourage players to explore their own superstitions. Does an Avenger feel a sense of cosmic apprehension when his favorite sturdy weapon falls apart in his hands? Does a Defender who loses her good-luck charm sense some intrinsic warning? A Redeemer may freak out that no monster has been able to look her in the eye for the last month, like they're all afraid. A Wayward may be convinced that he has to walk out of each battle with a new scar. He's come out of the last several fights clean, and that's a *bad sign*. Shadows look a little darker, the sun constantly seems dim, police sirens sound throughout the night like they never have before. Maybe local hunter activity seems overly frenzied and bloodthirsty. Almost any ominous event or trend can suggest bad tidings to sensitive imbued, hinting at what's to come in an Judgment Day chronicle.

GLIMPING THE TRUTH

You have a plan for how your game world will end. The question is just how much of the plan do you show the characters? Certainly, they'll see *what* Armageddon is, whether it's fire and brimstone, witches rewriting reality or the vanquishing of daylight. But will you show them *why* it's happening? Whose hand guides the ship toward the rocks? Ending your game with the characters completely ignorant of the final plan could cause frustration among your players. But the other end of the spectrum — revealing too much — ruins the mystery and desperation implicit to the last days.

As such, you need to strike a balance in allowing glimpses into the grand design. Think of it as giving the characters a peek through the keyhole into the horror that awaits in the next room. They see something of what's there, but the rest remains fearfully unknown.

How do you accomplish all this? Well, the Heralds don't need to descend from the clouds to "explain"

Armageddon like a villain in a James Bond movie. There are more subtle techniques.

MESSAGES

Intrinsic to **Hunter's** mythology are the Messengers — unfathomable forces from beyond that give obscure direction to the imbued. We've already posited the possibility that the Heralds may "amp up" their communication and share more information with hunters. Perhaps they offer *ambiguous* — as opposed to overt — insights into the fall of the world. Assuming there's some truth to *Apocrypha*, maybe hunters have visions of some of Fyodor's prophecies, such as the pyramids, the constellations, or even the man and woman with the bejeweled rings. A hunter may see these things on a billboard while driving past, or hear static whispers break through a radio transmission. She may even have dreams conveying such information. While such intervention doesn't provide hard-and-fast data, it offers a taste of the who, where and why of Armageddon, which could be enough to inspire hunters to seek further understanding.

HUNTER-NET

Every hunter is like a small piece of a riddle's answer, written on slips of paper and cast to the wind. They're all over the world, and may individually hold one tiny part of the truth. Each hunter potentially knows a little bit of their collective nature and the fate of the world, and each imbued has a *different* answer — some right, some wrong. Hunter-net is useful because all of these little truths can come together and provide a better (though incomplete) answer. You can also use hunter-net to disseminate the "realities" of Armageddon. What one hunter encounters in Sacramento is probably quite different than what another undergoes in Jerusalem. The first may see a "plague of flies" descend upon his hometown, while the other may write about a magician that spoke of the "approaching Lord of the Flies." A potential connection emerges, but only a tenuous one that requires characters to explore and research further. What clues to the end do different posters offer, whether they know it or not, and how can those pieces be sorted out?

Hunter-net is also an excellent place to disseminate false or misunderstood information, or to lead characters astray about the truth of the end. What if the aforementioned hunter mistranslated what the magician said? Or what if an extremist like God45 writes a grand dissertation on the "cancer of the president" and demands that the leader of the free world be assassinated? Could even the most conservative hunters fall in line with a madman's online explanation of Armageddon?

The artifacts at the beginning of this chapter include some hunter-net posts just like these that offer hints on what the last days are really about.

MONSTERS

This is the World of Darkness. Monsters are probably complicit in the end to some degree. If they're not

the cause, they're a symptom. It's possible that some monsters may be able to purposely or inadvertently give hunters insight into the architecture of the last days. Granted, they don't have to be right. While monsters may have their own glimpses, they should be far from the whole picture. But such suggestions can hold the seeds of truth and be springboards from which hunters see more of what's really going on. The Merciful may learn from shapechanger kin about some awful "red star" in the sky that's secretly the eye of an ancient beast coming to consume the world. Zealots putting the torch to a nest of leeches may find blood-spattered graffiti — urban prophecy about vampires rising up against humans. A Visionary reading forbidden texts stolen from a demon may learn secrets about the end of the world. Monsters have their own distorted views of Armageddon and its causes, and hunters can be exposed to them, but the imbued must always remember the source. God forbid that a monster's insights into the end might actually hasten the last days when acted upon.

Apocrypha

Fyodor's collection of notes is a storytelling device, one that presumably continues beyond its original incarnation. Other pages show up here and there, offering information not contained in the original "bundle." There's nothing stopping you from coming up with your own pages of *Apocrypha* to put into character (and player) hands. (The opening page of this chapter is one such document.) Feel free to emulate his writing style and scribbling and pass such props around the table.

Fyodor's visions are disturbingly foreboding, and yet still vague — perfect for conveying answers without diminishing the mystery. You can use new visions to pull back the curtain a little bit on whatever *modus operandi* is at work for the end of your game world. Not only do such discoveries help the characters understand some small part of the puzzle, they offer a more unified portrayal of the World of Darkness, as if your version is the "way it's meant to be." If the world succumbs to plague, maybe you can circulate a note from Fyodor detailing a "coming corruption of the soul, spirit and body of all mankind." If the end is brought about by the waking of ancient vampires, Fyodor might write, "Thirteen dead devils rise from the grave to consume their young and shackle the weak." Such lingering prophecies provide insight, but their veracity remains elusive. It's up to the characters how to act on them.

THE DAY AFTER

While your chronicle details the last days, they don't literally have to be the last days. Should characters or your game be particularly endearing or noteworthy, you and your players may not want to put a punctuation

mark on them. No matter how bad Armageddon is, it doesn't necessarily have to crack the planet and reduce the population to ash. Even the worst nuclear, biological, weather-related or monstrous threat can leave some semblance of the world behind. No matter what happens, catastrophe leaves humanity and the globe changed in some fashion, but to what degree is up to you. Will it be a degree that allows you to continue your game? If the chronicle *does* go on, what's the world like in the wake of obliteration?

If your story doesn't lead to utter ruin, what remains? Maybe humanity is enslaved by demons, discarnate spirits or by ancient vampires. What place do hunters have in this grisly New World Order? Are they hunted in turn? Are they enslaved along with everyone else, but might lead a revolt? Do they operate in clandestine cabals and guerilla groups, making attacks on monstrous overlords? Alternately, do hunters and humans cooperate to break monsters' grip on the world? Is it creatures who are destroyed or enslaved? Perhaps monsters are left scattered, going to ground to rise again one day.

If monsters are all destroyed, driven off or placated, does the world assume an Edenic state? What does this new utopia look like? While characters may seek such a "happy ending," they also may have no place in it — at least, not as imbued. Are their gifts revoked once the menace is thwarted? Perhaps they're allowed to return to normal, ordinary lives (if that's even possible after all they've seen and done). Or maybe hunters are given a new task by the Messengers — as leaders. Could the Heralds charge the imbued with the responsibility of shepherding society into a new Golden Age. How successful might they be? Do hunters assume the role naturally, or do they sink into megalomania and wear the mask that monsters once did? It's possible that hunters cannot agree and disparate groups fall into civil war. Does one hunter side fight for humanity and another for the "right" to abuse the mortal populace? Or do all groups simply wage war over a selfish slice of the pie, just as monsters once did? Do bystanders become the *new* hunters, going against the monstrous heirs of the new order?

Ultimately, anything can happen after Armageddon is more or less "resolved." The world could be half-dead and left in a nuclear winter, countries may dissolve and reform with new names and new boundaries, or whole new breeds of monster may crawl from the corpses of the dead. A post-apocalyptic scenario is limited only by your vision. Provided that you reserve a place for the chosen to keep players entertained, you can open a door to an entirely different chronicle and **Hunter** experience. The end of the world doesn't need to mean the end of your game. The path is wide open and the territory uncharted.



CHAPTER 4

KINDRED

OF THE EAST

"INTERESTING TIMES"

"May you live in interesting times."
— Chinese curse

HOLLOW VICTORIES

"To Victory!"

Crystal glasses clinked gently in the high-class office. Its broad windows afforded a spectacular view of San Francisco Bay and the city spread out below, lights glittering in the velvet darkness, reflecting the stars in the clear sky above. The glasses were filled with blood, still warm and fragrant, and a decanter of the same sat on the antique side table. To the cold lips it touched, the blood tasted fiery and potent, stronger than the finest liquor, better than the best vintage the wine country to the north had to offer.

Jochen Van Nuys, the former prince of San Francisco, lowered his glass, savoring both the taste and the moment. He couldn't restrain a small smile, glancing in the direction of Sara Anne Winder, the current prince of his city. *Ah, but for how long, dear Sara, he thought, for how long?* Winder caught the smile and its implications, and shot Van Nuys a glare before raising her own glass.

"Here is to a victory hard-won," she announced the people gathered in the room. "The Cathayans and their so-called 'New Promise Mandarinate' have been driven from our shores. What was once ours is ours again. Tonight is indeed a night for celebration, but we shouldn't allow ourselves to become complacent. It's just when you think you've won that the unexpected occurs. We won't repeat the

mistakes that allowed San Francisco and Los Angeles to fall into foreign hands. To victory, and to vigilance." She returned Van Nuys' look with equal measure as the high-ranking Camarilla of San Francisco sipped from their glasses.

As the knot of guests broke up and mingled, Van Nuys noticed his aide, Peter Kwan, standing discretely near the door of the suite, unobtrusive as a piece of furniture. Kwan caught his eye and Van Nuys made his way over.

"Sire," Kwan said in a low, formal tone.

"What word, Peter?"

"Nothing as yet," he replied. "No word from the scourges investigating Bayview. It may be that there are packs of Sabbat active there, or possibly some Cathayans."

Van Nuys nodded gravely. "Inform me as soon as there's any news."

"Of course," the young man said as he turned and left the suite.

Kwan waited until he reached the elevator before he took the cell phone from his jacket pocket and dialed the number he had committed to memory, rather than to speed dial.

"Well?" the voice said on the other end.

"They don't suspect."

"Good. We'll see that it remains that way. Will you be missed?"

"Not for some time."

"Then come and meet us here. Your knowledge of the Kin-jin will help us with our... guests. I want to make them as welcome as possible."

"Yes, Master," Kwan replied, before folding the phone and slipping it back into his pocket. Soon he was walking out of the lobby, headed for the car that would take him to Bayview for a meeting with his true lord, Chan Te of the Hollow City *wu*, Warlord of Mikaboshi, the Yama King and Lord of the Wicked City. He paused to glance up at the lights in the high glass tower. The Kindred partying there believed they'd liberated the city from the Cathayan invaders, assured they had everything under control.

"It's often just when you think you've won..." he muttered, echoing Prince Winder's toast. The Kindred would soon discover the truth of those words, just as the Kuei-jin were learning now.

Jiejie Li, known as Elder Sister Plum, Bone Flower Ancestor of the Extraordinary Commission, sat as still as death. Only fitting, as the elder sister had been dead for

quite some time, and it was the topic of death that was foremost on her mind. She felt the stillness of her heart, the stillness of her breath, and mirrored them with a stillness in her mind.

I am the Black Metal Egg, she thought, repeating the mantra to herself. *I am the Cold Mind. I listen in the stillness and hear the song of the shadow.*

Her dark eyes opened slowly and looked upon the scattered, dead cherry blossoms on the perfect white sheet. The air stirred gently like the world sighing. In that moment, the Bone Flower ancestor heard the song of the shadow. The darkness filled her and she understood. She plucked a single withered petal from the cloth and brushed it gently against her cheek, feeling the last traces of life in it, feeling it wither in her grasp.

She almost did not hear the others approach. Then came the noise of slippers on ancient stone and the whisper of silk as the Honored Ancestors of the August Courts appeared. They approached in perfect step, like a dragon twining its coils across the plaza. They stood in a row in front of the spot where Jiejie Li sat. They bowed, and Elder Sister Plum nodded in return. Then she took a



folded piece of rice paper from the sash of her pure white robe, unfolding it with slow, crisp motions, still holding the petal between her fingers. She lowered the paper to her lap and began to read softly.

"I heard the words of darkness within me, and I knew those words.

It was the true voice of my heart.

And I was enlightened."

Then the page and the petal slipped from Jeijei Li's slender, pale fingers, swept up in the wind that whispered through the square. The row of ancestors stood silent. If they noticed that the elder sister's final words were a reading from a heretical and forbidden text, they did not show it. What did it matter now? One by one, they turned and silently walked back toward the shadowed doorway from whence they came.

From the shelter of the shadows, the honored ancestors watched as the sky lightened and became the color of the dried blossoms. The sun crested the horizon. As its first rays touched her, Elder Sister Plum did not cry out or even move from where she sat, serenely composed. She remained so as the brightening rays slowly withered her smooth flesh. Her skin went gray, then black in the light. The flesh rotted from her bones as she faced the judgment of the Eye of Heaven. Nearly half the sun's disc cleared the horizon before a gentle wind caused the corpse of the Ancestor of the Extraordinary Commission to fall into dust, scattered along with the dry petals.

Chan Te, Warlord of Mikaboshi, looked over the bodies of the Kin-jin chained to the stark gray walls of the old warehouse. The building had been refurbished into expensive office space in the '90s, and then promptly lost any potential clients when the dot.com bubble burst. The space still served the Hollow City *wu* well enough. The Kin-jin knew nothing about it, and by the time they discovered it, it would be far too late.

Tjun-tjun laughed brightly as she brushed a hand across the bare chest of one of the western vampires, bending to lick a trickle of blood from the welts there.

"It's only a taste," she said at Chan Te's disapproving glare.

"Be sure that's all it is," he said, and the Indonesian woman laughed again. Chan Te was about to warn her of the dangers of underestimating the Kin-jin when the door opened and Peter Kwan entered with a respectful bow to the leader of the *wu*. He didn't even glance at the Kin-jin prisoners, his attention focused on Chan Te.

"Peter, how are things with the victors?"

"As expected," the young man replied. "Winder is taking full credit for the victory and she clearly expects Van Nuys to go away. He clearly has no intention of doing so. They're practically at each other's throats now that the immediate threat of the invaders is out of the way. They're both looking for ways to turn the situation to their advantage. Van Nuys is the definite underdog. He intends to address matters in Bayview as a means of assembling support, but I think he hopes the problem will solve itself."

"Oh, it will," Tjun-tjun said, "but not the way he hopes."

Chan Te nodded. "And the Kin-jin do not sense anything... amiss?"

Kwan shook his head. "No, nothing at all. We Kindred are nowhere near as attuned to the flows of Chi as your august selves. Regrettably, we are no more aware than most mortals, maybe even less. From what I've seen, the Kin-jin will attribute any unusual feelings to recent events. After all, most of them don't even believe in the philosophies of the Kuei-jin. Van Nuys is a potential problem, though."

"Go on," Chan Te said when Kwan paused.

"He... paid close attention during his time with the New Promise Mandarinate. While I don't think he understands the nuances of the dragon nests or *feng shui*, he is aware of the concerns the Cloud Mandarins had about Bayview. After all, he was involved in trying to resolve matters. He might not agree with their views about bad joss or poison arrows, but he's at least aware of them and might figure things out."

"Then we'll just have to see to it that he doesn't have the time," the warlord said. He picked up a curved knife from a table beside one of the Kindred prisoners and toyed with it as he thought.

"Prince Winder is well guarded?" he asked idly.

"Extraordinarily well guarded," Kwan said. "That bitch Caravaggio is constantly on guard. She hasn't relaxed a bit. In fact, I'd say she's become even more paranoid. She knows Van Nuys wants his domain back. She seems to expect foul play."

"Perfect. We'll confirm her suspicions and give both the current and former prince reason to focus on each other. That will give us the time we need. Time is on our side, Peter. Just a little longer and the broken mirror will extend beyond the reaches of Bayview into the rest of the city. Then..." He punctuated the thought with a flick of the knife and a wicked smirk.

"We'll use one of these?" Kwan asked, turning in the direction of the prisoners for the first time.

"Of course," Chan Te said. "You can help Tjun-tjun choose one, preferably with known sympathies for Van Nuys. An assassination attempt against the prince by one of her own kind should keep the Kin-jin occupied."

The young man walking away from the abandoned office park would rate little notice, which was just as he intended. He could have been a student at a local college, in his leather jacket, jeans and sweatshirt. But his green eyes suggested more experience than his apparent 20-something years. Lifetimes more experience.

Yulan-tao was certain, the *akuma* had infiltrated the ranks of the Kin-jin. He didn't know for certain if they had aided the western vampires, but he knew full well that the servants of the Yama Kings were responsible for the state of the Bayview district. Although he wore a westerner's body, Yulan-tao had been born in the Middle Kingdom, died there, and took the Second Breath there. He was a wandering ghost, a spirit with no body to truly call his own, although he had inhabited the one he wore now for many years.

His unique nature had protected him somewhat, allowed him to go where others could not. It also allowed him to sense the dangers the Kin-jin could not. Yulan-tao had spent time in the Yomi World. Each time he suffered the little death, his spirit had been drawn back there to suffer the torments of hell. He knew its shape and substance, and now he felt the touch of Yomi very close by. The Wall between the worlds was growing weaker with each passing night as the *akuma* poisoned the Chi of the dragon nests, and hell grew like a sore beneath the city's skin. Soon it would burst forth with all its bile.

Jamming his hands into the pockets of his jacket, Yulan-tao hurried down the street. There was no more time. He had to find what allies he could in hopes of stemming the tide, although he wasn't sure there was anything anyone could do. The signs were all there.

The end was coming.

INTRODUCTION

The Wheel of Ages turns. The Eye of the Demon Emperor is visible in the heavens. The signs and portents have come to pass and the Age of Darkness draws to a close, but most of the Kuei-jin, the Hungry Dead, are ignorant of the turning of the tide. They either do not see or choose not to see the future that awaits them, but the wheel cannot be stopped and the Fifth Age passes whether the Demon People acknowledge it or not. The signs are there for even the blind to see. The end has come.

The end for the **Kindred of the East** setting is a part of the eschatological lore of the Kuei-jin. Asian vampires believe there are cycles to the world, transitions from one Age to the next. There have already been several such Ages, five to be exact, and the world sits on the cusp of the Sixth Age. Exactly when the Sixth Age, the Age of Sorrow, will arrive is a matter of considerable speculation and debate among the Kuei-jin, but the time for debate is over. The Sixth Age is not only coming, it's here.

This chapter describes different ways for you to bring about the arrival of the Sixth Age in your chronicle. It can come as a climatic ending to an existing game, or you can create an entirely new chronicle to play out the ending foretold by the sutras and traditions of the Demon People. You can even use the material in this chapter as inspiration for creating an all-new **Kindred of the East** series set in the Sixth Age itself, after the world familiar to the Kuei-jin has changed irrevocably. The power is in your hands, as it always has been.

That includes the power to decide exactly how the Sixth Age arrives in your own World of Darkness setting. This chapter presents four different versions of the end of the Fifth Age and the beginning of the Age of Sorrow. You can choose any one of them or take elements from each to create your own version.

"The Rising of One Hundred Clouds" ends the Fifth Age with a whimper rather than a bang. The Wall between the spirit worlds and the Middle Kingdom grows to become an impassable barrier. The realms of spirit and flesh are forever divided, cutting the Kuei-jin off from

their mystical source. Many Asian vampires meet Final Death and no others return from the depths of Yomi. Some elders apparently achieve the enlightenment they seek while other Kuei-jin face the wrath of mortal hunters and other enemies.

"Serpent Bites the Hand" describes the plans of Oliver Thrace, a Tremere vampire who has been the "guest" of the Kuei-jin. It turns out that Thrace has his own plans for the future, which include making a deal with the Yama Kings, and a ritual that spells the end of the Kuei-jin and victory for the Camarilla. Or at least, so all are led to believe.

"The Trumpet of Mount Meru" signals the beginning of the Sixth Age when the forces of Heaven imbue mortal demon hunters with the divine power to equal that of the legendary Wan Xian. These champions take up a crusade against the Wan Kuei to destroy as many of the Hungry Dead as possible before the Demon Emperor can assume the throne. The Kuei-jin find themselves in a battle for their very existence as the Age of Sorrow dawns.

"Wicked City" describes the triumph of the Great Leap Outward and the Kuei-jin conquest of western cities, but in a way that the August Courts never imagined. The sites of Kuei-jin conquest become the beachheads of the Yama King Mikaboshi as he spreads his influence across the world. He prepares to assume the throne of the Demon Emperor, with the dread Tou Mu at his side as Iron Empress.

Each scenario offers suggestions on how to incorporate it into an ongoing chronicle, along with ways to customize the story. This chapter concludes with "Storytelling the Sixth Age," which provides advice on running Sixth Age stories and concluding **Kindred of the East** chronicles. It also offers suggestions on how to modify the game's rules and systems to suit a particular end, or a new chronicle set in the Age of Sorrow.

INAUSPICIOUS SIGNS

The signs of the impending Sixth Age are everywhere. Indeed, the signs have been there for some time, but many Kuei-jin have been unwilling — or unable — to see them for what they are. It is only recently that the marks of the end have become unmistakable, although there are still those who do not wish to believe.

Storytellers can use these and other inauspicious signs of the impending Sixth Age to build up to the end of a **Kindred of the East** chronicle.

THAT WHICH IS FORETOLD

From the Shadow Sutra of the Bodhisattva Faceless Mask

In the embrace of the Dark Jade Lover, my eyes were opened and I was enlightened.

In the passage between lives, between acts on the stage that is the Middle Kingdom, I looked and saw the cycle of the Ages passing before me. The Wheel of Ages descends toward the coming of the Sixth Age, the Age of Sorrow, as surely as death follows upon life. It is inevitable, just as desirable as the embrace of the Dark Lover.

I saw the coming of the Sixth Age, and these shall be its signs to you:

The Eye of the Demon Emperor will look down upon the Middle Kingdom from the sky, mocking the Eye of Heaven.

The grasp of the Yama Kings will tighten upon the souls of Yomi Wan. Fewer will escape their net to take the Second Breath. The ranks of the Demon People will diminish.

The Running Monkeys will disregard tradition and the words of their elders, following their own counsel to their own ends.

The ancestors will turn from their duties to pursue their own affairs, putting aside responsibility and tradition. They will extend their reach while their house decays around them.

The wheels of spirit and matter will turn independent of each other, and the Mirror Lands will reflect nothing of the Middle Kingdom.

The influence of Yomi will be felt everywhere, the hands of the Yama Kings grasping as the Demon Emperor rises.

The August Personage of Jade will quit the throne of Heaven and throw down the wicked and the unworthy. Terrible will be the wrath and vengeance of Heaven as Ten Thousand Demons are unleashed upon the world.

The Demon Emperor will ascend the throne to rule over the Age of Sorrow, but in the turning of the Wheel and the passing of the Age, as in the last moments of life, the veil will be lifted and the way up the slopes of Mount Meru will be clear. In the embrace of the Dark Jade Lover, in the nothingness between lives, in the end we will be enlightened.

THE BROKEN MIRROR

A newspaper article from the San Francisco Chronicle

Seven brutal murders have occurred within a 15-block radius in the Bayview area of the city over the past two months. The most recent victim was discovered Tuesday. All of the victims were killed in what police describe as a "ritual" manner, their bodies drained of blood that was not found at the scene of any of the crimes. The SFPD informs citizens that it is following "all possible leads" in the case of the so-called "Bayview Killer," but admits that it hasn't made much progress.

Police forensics experts believe that the killings are the work of a serial killer, possibly more than one, and have suggested that the initial murders may have inspired "copy-cat" killings. Police also say there is no evidence of more than one suspect at this time.

Residents and those working in the Bayview district remain in their homes and workplaces as much as possible while police investigate. Rising tensions have led to an increase in domestic violence and public disturbances, and angry citizens demand police action before they take matters into their own hands. The police department warns that vigilantism will not be tolerated.

From a report to the Cloud Mandarins of San Francisco

Honored mandarins, it is clear that the killings that have taken place in the Bayview Munificent Transition Sector are the work of one or more Kin-jin defying the edicts of the New Promise Mandarinate. All efforts to locate the perpetrators have been unsuccessful. The Kin-jin we have questioned deny any involvement in the killings, or knowledge of them. Although many of them are quick to accuse others of their kind, we have found no evidence that these accusations are anything other than attempts to assign blame and to put an end to our investigation. Some Kin-jin believe that a sect of their kind called Sabbath is responsible for the killings, but we have found no evidence of their involvement.

It is clear that many of the Kin-jin in the Bayview M-T sector are nearly as concerned about the killings as we are, although for somewhat different reasons. Kin-jin feeding has become increasingly difficult, because mortal authorities and inhabitants are almost constantly on guard. This has led to demands that the Kin-jin be allowed to leave the sector in order to hunt. Border guards report that more Kin-jin have attempted to slip out of the sector. Incidents of violence among the Kin-jin have increased despite our best efforts.

I must once again humbly suggest that the only means of effectively dealing with the Bayview problem is to either move the Kin-jin residents to another M-T sector until the investigation can be concluded or eliminate the Kin-jin in this sector in hopes of eliminating the responsible party. Systematic executions might encourage the Kin-jin to turn over any culprits and put an end to the matter. Otherwise, we must remove the Kin-jin from Bayview if we are to have any chance of resolving matters quickly.

THE GREAT LEAP OUTWARD

From a letter by Jiejie Li, Bone Flower Ancestor of the Extraordinary Commission

Some animals, when hungry or thirsty enough, will gorge themselves to the point where they become sick or even choke and suffocate. By trying to secure success, we have sown the seeds of our own failure and destruction.

My opposition to the Ash Plan of the Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders is well known and described in my other writings. I believed then as I believe now that a crusade against the Kin-jin is ill considered and ill timed given the threats that face the August Courts much closer to home. The call for a foreign war is often used to conceal other problems that warmongers cannot or do not want to face.

Once the Kin-jin hold over Hong Kong was broken, once the foreign *akuma* were driven from the Flesh Court, the August Courts were still plagued by corruption, hidden *akuma* and a poor understanding of the demands of the modern age. All of that allowed the Kin-jin to accomplish so much in such a relatively short time. The need for reform in the Middle Kingdom was clear, but those in power chose to direct the righteous anger of the Wan Kuei at the Kin-jin. It is akin to hunting animals digging in your garden while your house burns behind you.

War against a clear enemy is easy. Battling enemies within is difficult. And so, the Glorious Ocean-Crossing

Warriors reached out and seized one of the North American cities of the Kin-jin. When their invasion went awry, other forces needed to step in to secure Los Angeles and ensure victory. When negotiations for peace ended in violence, we were forced to take another city and hold it where we only planned to hold one. We trapped ourselves on a boat rushing down the river of time toward destiny. All we could see to do was hold on a little further, just a bit more, and it would be done.

What we do not see are the sharp rocks waiting at the bottom of the falls. Even though I will be dashed upon those rocks, others will not see it. They will continue down the river, continue fighting in the burning house, until the few who remain look around, find themselves alone and wonder what has happened. How has it come to this? It is nothing more or less than our own blindness that will be our undoing, as it has been since the fall of the Ten Thousand Immortals.

HEAVEN'S VENGEANCE

From a letter sent from central China to Hong Kong

I had the dream again last night. I hear the trumpet calling far away and feel like I've awakened from a deep sleep, even though I'm actually still sleeping. I feel like I'm young again. More than that, I feel *strong*, filled with purpose, like I can overlook the last 20 years of fighting and killing.

I start climbing the hill and I notice there are others walking with me. Some of them I recognize, like you and Xiu Ping. Others I don't know, but I know that we're all Shih, and everyone seems to feel the same sense of purpose, the same sense of empowerment.

Then we come to the top of the hill and see them, the demons. It's an army stretching out as far as the eye can see. Some of them look like people. Others are like rotted corpses or monsters with four arms and three flaming eyes. Some have weapons, like we do. Others have claws and fangs. They're strangely silent, and we just stand there for a moment, looking at each other. Then they roar. They charge, screaming for our blood, and the battle is joined.

I know that I am going to die, but I keep fighting like I was taught. I see others fall, but I keep going. I lop off the head of one demon and another takes its place. There's blood everywhere and the smell of burning flesh. Cries and the ringing of metal. Then the trumpet sounds again and there's a moment of stillness. Everything stops as we search for the source of the sound.

The sun breaks through the clouds, shining down on us. I feel on fire, filled with Chi, and the demons shriek and recoil from the light. I raise my sword to Heaven, shout and we charge forward into their lines, cutting with blades on fire, cutting through their ranks like a scythe. The trumpet sounds again and I wake.

I was ready to dismiss it all as the madness of an old woman who has seen too much blood and death, except for this: I met another of us earlier today, the only other Shih I have seen in five years. I realized that I'd seen him before, in the dream. When I told him about it, he was startled and said that he had the very same dream.

AN END TO ORTHODOXY

From a letter to the Ancestors of the August Courts of the Quincunx

If you wish to speak to a peasant farmer in the heart of Yang-tze Province, you had best speak in that peasant's language. Speaking to him in formal Mandarin will only earn you an uncomprehending stare. So this letter is penned in proper language in brush-strokes that have not changed in centuries, so that the Honored Ancestors of the August Courts can recognize and understand it for what it is. Through the power of the information age, however, this letter is also being distributed to Kuei-jin across the world so that they can also appreciate and understand its contents.

You see, the time is past when the August Courts and the Bestowed Ancestor can dictate truth to the Wan Kuei. The nights when the Quincunx could burn heretical documents and heretics to ensure that they would never been seen are past. Now such knowledge can have a life of its own, beyond the reach of those who would see it suppressed. No longer can the mandarins of the courts reign in silence.

I am not *akuma*, although the August Courts will name me so. My true name is not important. The message that I deliver is. I call to my fellow Wan Kuei to awaken, to cast off the bonds of tradition placed on them, and to see that now is the time for action, not contemplation. Our Honored Ancestors may have been content to meditate and study ancient lore for centuries, but those of us who have taken the Second Breath in this day and age no longer have the luxury. The August Courts have squandered what time they had to prepare, and now the time is upon us. The Sixth Age has come.

It is no longer a time to debate the merits of Dharmas or to enforce orthodoxy. It is a time to recognize the true connection between us all, the common link that we who have taken the Second Breath share. We are dead. We have seen the hell that awaits us in the Age of Sorrow. I know you remember the screams and torments of Yomi, because I know that I will never forget them. They are like scars on my soul, always there in the darkness and silence. They are what awaits the world if we do nothing, if we abandon our one chance at redemption and allow the Yama Kings to drag the world down.

"Damn redemption!" you say. I know that many Kuei-jin care nothing for the judgment of Heaven, so consider your own existence. Will the Yama Kings tolerate those not sworn to their service once the Demon Emperor assumes his throne? Do you wish to return to the torments of Yomi that you fought so hard to escape? If not, then you must act for your own sake if not for the sake of the world.

I was taught that the Wan Kuei are fallen and dishonored heroes because our ancestors failed and suffered Heaven's punishment. So I ask, should we allow bitterness, despair and shame to chain us and keep us from acting, or should we overcome the failures of those who came before us and stand against the forces of hell before they consume the world? Put aside these petty matters of politics and let the Ten Thousand Demons unite against the Lords of Yomi!

THE HUNTERS HUNTED

A memorandum distributed to top-ranking agents of Strike Force Zero

This document is to inform you that Operation: Night Frost has begun. Our organization has gathered extensive information on the activities of the gaki over the past decade and now the time has come for us to move against these enemies of humanity and end their threat, once and for all. You have trained and prepared for this time and I know that you will not fail.

The operation will proceed in stages, as outlined below. Stage one begins immediately. Your assignments will be forwarded to you along with this document. I would wish you luck, but there is no room for luck in our careful planning. The hopes and future of humanity go with you.

Stage I: Simultaneous strikes against known gaki lairs in major Japanese urban areas, along with efforts to restrict enemy communication and reaction. Agents are instructed to neutralize any hostiles by whatever means necessary.

Stage II: Pursuit of surviving gaki subjects, along with coordinated follow-up sweeps through surrounding suburban areas, extending outward into the rural and wilderness areas of the Japanese Islands. The agency will have the assistance and cooperation of conventional authorities in these matters, but agents are instructed to maintain secrecy and handle matters with the absolute minimum public exposure.

Stage III: Cooperative operations with international intelligence agencies against gaki worldwide. This stage will begin when the security of the Home Islands is assured. Agents will be briefed on their assignments at the appropriate time.

THE SOUNDS OF WAR

An e-mail sent to a server in Hong Kong

It is confirmed. They have it.

It was almost certainly built by the North Korean government, probably using materials and information acquired from various sources. Although there's been no test, all the information I've seen says it will work. The Heavenly Devils certainly seem to think so. As much as I want to believe they won't use it, I know they will, and soon.

We are working as quickly as possible to discover the intended target, but we have only theories right now. Most likely it is intended for a strike against heretics in the Infinite Thunders Court, but it may also be intended for somewhere in the Golden Courts or perhaps even in the domain of the Kin-jin. Such a strike would fulfill certain prophecies and sutras of the Burning Wind sect, bringing the wrath of Heaven to the wicked and unleashing the power of Hell on Earth.

The only thing that I am certain of right now is that they have the weapon and they intend to use it. There can be no doubt. The Sixth Age is upon us, and it is only a matter of time before the forces of Heaven's vengeance are unleashed.

THE RISING OF ONE HUNDRED CLOUDS

Throughout their tormented existence, the Kuei-jin have sought peace and enlightenment, harmony between the divided halves of their nature: Hun and P'o, Yin and Yang. There are many stories of bodhisattvas finding the hidden path to the slopes of Mount Meru and attaining the enlightenment of the Hundred Clouds, but are they just tales, stories for damned souls with no hope of redemption? With the portents of the Age of Sorrow all around them, the Kuei-jin hope that there is more to their Dharmas than merely holding the demon within at bay another night. It seems they may be right.

INTRODUCTION

It ends, not with a roar, but with a sigh, like the resigned last breath of a dying man. The Sixth Age arrives in a form quite unexpected by the Kuei-jin, and they are forced to adapt to a diminished existence in the Age of Sorrow or accept Final Death at last.

The changing of the Age comes with the strengthening of the Wall between the Middle Kingdom and the spirit worlds. It grows from a barrier to an impassable gulf, closing off the realm of spirit from the realm of matter. The *shen*, denizens of the Yin and Yang Worlds, withdraw. With the rise of the Demon Emperor, the Yomi World is sealed off and the Yama Kings are no longer a threat. The inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom, Kuei-jin and mortal, are left alone with an uncertain future.

BUILDING THE DRAGON WALL

The first sign of the coming Sixth Age is the strengthening of the Wall between the material world and the spirit world. Kuei-jin should notice a gradual increase in the Wall rating of certain areas, making access to the spirit worlds more challenging. It begins in places where Wall ratings are already high. Places with initial ratings of 8 or 9 become completely impassable. The barrier between the worlds is simply too thick for any force to overcome it. Kuei-jin who have passed through the Wall in those regions may need to travel some distance to find other spots where they can return to the Middle Kingdom.

Then the Wall begins to grow stronger in places more attuned to the Kuei-jin and the forces of Chi. Not only does the Wall become stronger, but the ambient Chi in those places grows weaker as the spiritual is closed off from the material. Kuei-jin sufficiently advanced in their Dharmas to draw Chi directly from the environment find it more difficult to do so. This denial forces elder Wan Kuei to feed through crude means (such as breath or blood-draining) or to unleash their P'o to tear through the Wall and get at a place's Chi, defiling it (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 138, for details). The increased need for mortal Chi is felt throughout the Middle Kingdom, as elder Kuei-jin must hunt for sustenance once more.



What begins as a troublesome phenomenon becomes a serious concern when the Wall strengthens more and more. Soon, all urban areas are completely impassable and the Chi of even wild places and dragon nests is reduced from wellsprings to mere trickles. Passing through the Wall isn't easy anywhere, and Kuei-jin notice that the Wall seems thicker, the spirit worlds more distant as if they are drifting further and further out of reach.

THE WEIGHT OF DEATH

The strengthening of the Wall has a number of effects on Kuei-jin in the Middle Kingdom and throughout the world. Feeding becomes more challenging for elder Kuei-jin as they're cut off from the Chi of the spirit worlds. The ability to traverse the paths of spirit is hazardous, depriving the Kuei-jin of a valuable weapon in their arsenal. An increasing number of undead look to their elders for guidance, but receive none.

The difficulty of obtaining Chi from dragon lines forces elders to hunt again. The result is a rise in Kuei-jin activity, particularly in places where elders are most concentrated, such as with the Five Courts of the Quincunx. Competition for Chi becomes intense. Although there are still plenty of mortals on which to feed, the increased activity is noticeable, as the Kuei-jin soon discover.

Of greater impact is the loss of the capacity to traverse spirit-world paths. That capability has been one of the keys to the Great Leap Outward and the Kuei-jin struggle against western Kindred. Unable to simply slip into the spirit worlds to appear and disappear as they wish, the Kuei-jin must rely on conventional means of travel. The Kindred have an easier time tracking and containing Kuei-jin, and Kuei-jin have difficulty moving reinforcements into place in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Nor can they rely on aid from the spirit worlds as other *shen* become increasingly scarce and hard to contact.

With the situation surrounding the Two-Fang Serpent Plan growing increasingly unstable, and with Kuei-jin around the world concerned about the unexplained intensity of the Wall, the ancestors of the courts are expected to act. They do, but not in the ways that might be expected.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

The events of this part of "The Rising of One Hundred Clouds" are best incorporated into an ongoing **Kindred of the East** chronicle as background material and a new wrinkle in whatever challenges the characters already face. For example, they might notice an increase in the difficulty of overcoming the Wall in some places, followed by even greater challenges. Perhaps an attempt to enter or leave the spirit worlds fails unexpectedly, forcing the characters to improvise. Spirits and other *shen* known to them are suddenly absent or more difficult to contact. Those places where *shen* have typically gathered are deserted.

The characters may notice more Kuei-jin hunting than usual. Perhaps they even come upon an ancestor

known to them who feeds by breath-draining, an unusual act for an elder. There's increased concern over protecting dragon nests, and there are hints that activity among the Kuei-jin might draw undue attention from outsiders.

A *wu* involved in the events of the Great Leap Outward and the occupation of Los Angeles and San Francisco may face trouble when access to the spirit worlds becomes unreliable or impossible. The Kindred quickly take advantage of any perceived weakness in Cathayan enemies, pressing the Kuei-jin, possibly trapping them in the cities with no means of escape. Such developments can lead to a siege or even a heroic escape as the Kuei-jin are forced to withdraw, save for the leaders of the New Promise Mandarinate and the Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders. Those who most strongly support the Great Leap Outward choose to face the Eye of Heaven rather than suffer the shame of failure.

A forced evacuation of Kuei-jin from North America can signal the beginning of the end for a chronicle about the Great Leap Outward. Alternatively, the characters may choose to mount a heroic last stand against the Kin-jin or meet the Eye of Heaven themselves rather than retreat, in which case you should arrange a suitably climactic ending. Survivors (if any) can witness the remainder of events leading up to the dawn of the Sixth Age.

CONFRONTING THE EYE OF HEAVEN

As the gulf between the spirit worlds and the Middle Kingdom widens, events gain momentum and the Wan Kuei are in dire need of leadership and guidance in what is their most desperate hour. They do not receive it from their elders, however, who begin to vanish or fall into despair and Final Death. Characters cannot find allies or shelter with the other *shen* of the Middle Kingdom, who depart into the spirit worlds. This exodus leaves young generations of Kuei-jin alone to face their various enemies.

CLOUDS GATHER

As the Wall becomes impassable, ancestors of the Kuei-jin courts disappear. It's only a few at first — elders who have stepped into the spirit worlds and are unable to return. Rumors spread that they investigate the cause of the gulf between worlds, or are engaged in other important business of court. When these elder Kuei-jin fail to return, their subordinates do the best they can to fill the vacancies, but more and more ancestors go missing.

Realization of the dawning Sixth Age proves a tremendous moment of insight for the eldest of the Kuei-jin, allowing some of them to achieve the enlightenment of *dāh*. They ascend to the Hundred Clouds. Like the spirit worlds, they leave the Middle Kingdom and the young Kuei-jin behind.

For other elder Kuei-jin, the rising of the Wall means something else. The Yama Kings call the hidden *akuma* of the courts home. Some ancestors walk into Hell willingly, while others are dragged there to pay their debts to the Lords of Yomi. Either way, these elders do not return.

If the characters have an ancestor mentor, ally or even enemy, they should be witness to that bodhisattva's

departure. The elder comes to the characters and tells them that the Cycle of the Great Wheel is turning, that the next Age is coming, and that it will be their destiny to deal with it in their own way. Even if the elder was antagonistic toward the characters before, the time for enmity is past. Then the ancestor steps across the Wall (regardless of the local difficulty of doing so) and vanishes into the spirit worlds.

FACING THE JUDGMENT OF HEAVEN

If you prefer a less pleasant fate for ancestors and bodhisattvas than attaining the Hundred Clouds, you can decide that the separation of the spirit worlds from the Middle Kingdom drives elders into profound despair. It's proof that all their struggles and the philosophies of their Dharmas have been for naught. Ancestors watch their goals drift further and further out of reach until there is no hope of ever attaining them, until it's clear that the Middle Kingdom will be cut off from the spirit worlds altogether. Rather than wait for it, the Kuei-jin choose Final Death. They face the Eye of Heaven or face some other means of ending their unliving existence, freeing themselves from the Wheel of Karma before the end comes.

Perhaps suicide turns out to be the actual key to enlightenment. The willingness to accept death rather than cling needlessly to unlife, allowing elders to ascend to the Hundred Clouds. Or maybe Kuei-jin elders face the final test and fail. At the end, they falter, choose death and their souls suffer in Yomi throughout the next Age. That may also be the meaning of the prophecies of the Sixth Age. Perhaps those Kuei-jin who bravely face what the future holds are the ones who finally climb the slopes of Mount Meru and reach the Hundred Clouds, or at least achieve the release of a true and honest death, allowing them to begin the cycle anew.

FOLLOWING THE BODHISATTVA'S PATH

The departure of so many ancestors and bodhisattvas throws Kuei-jin courts into chaos. Young mandarins and jina attempt to step in and take up the reins of power, but many factions seek to do the same. Remaining Kuei-jin are divided, pursuing various goals. Some wish to follow in the footsteps of the ancestors to find their paths to Mount Meru. Others try to seize the opportunity to attain power and influence, even control over the courts now that the ancestors are gone. Finally, some Kuei-jin see separation from the spirit worlds as a sign that they will never achieve true enlightenment, or that they will achieve it only through death, and so set out to destroy themselves and possibly the world. The characters may try to follow any or all of these paths, and might get entangled in the efforts of other Wan Kuei.

- **Seeking Enlightenment:** Many Kuei-jin believe that the vanished ancestors have achieved the enlightenment of the Hundred Clouds, that they

have discovered the secret of true immortality and freedom from cursed unlife. These young vampires diligently pursue the same goal, usually by renewed dedication to their Dharmas and efforts to explore the paths of the spirit worlds before they are lost altogether. There may be an exodus into the Yin or Yang Worlds before the Wall closes them off forever. Even more Kuei-jin depart the Middle Kingdom, never to return. Extremists and would-be gurus among the various Dharmas become common.

- **Seeking Power:** The departure of the ancestors represents an unprecedented opportunity for young Kuei-jin to seize power. Some ancestors carefully set their affairs in order and appoint successors to their duties. Others do not and some successions are disputed. Shadow wars break out among all courts as mandarins and jina struggle for power and control. If the Great Leap Outward hasn't already collapsed from the growth of the Wall, it almost certainly does once the August Courts turn inward, consumed by their own affairs. The power struggles of the Cathayans can form the basis for a short chronicle, or they can quickly erode the structure and traditions of the courts, expediting the chaos of the Sixth Age.

- **Seeking Death:** Finally, some Kuei-jin are taken by despair and hopelessness. With the signs of the Sixth Age all around them, these vampires follow the examples of ancestors who choose Final Death. They face the Eye of Heaven or find other means of ending their existence. Some Kuei-jin might not deliberately seek death, but find it anyway when their enemies move against them.

HERESIES AND THE FIVEFOLD PATH

The various Dharmas — and the factions within them — interpret and react to the signs of the impending Sixth Age in different ways. For the heretical Dharmas, this is an opportunity to press their own ideals as the Dharmas of the Fivefold Path struggle to maintain their positions. Here are some suggestions on how the Dharmas might react to events in this story.

- **Howl of the Devil Tiger:** The Heavenly Devils are confused. It wasn't supposed to be like this. The end of the Age of Darkness was supposed to come with a glorious battle in which they would rise up against the legions of Yomi and cast them back into Hell. It was supposed to come with the destruction of the corrupt world so that a new one would take its place. It wasn't supposed to be this lingering weakness. Some Devil Tigers decide to take the conflict to their enemies, punishing the wicked in increasing numbers — and fighting demon hunters and others who would prey on the weakness of the Wan Kuei. For others, the revelation of the number of *akuma* in the ranks of the Dharma is disheartening. Of all the Dharmas, the Devil Tigers are most likely to take extreme action when faced with the arrival of the Sixth Age.

- **Way of the Resplendent Crane:** The Resplendent Cranes do their best to maintain order in the courts, but loss of their elders hamstring their efforts. The Shining Ice Guardians also see the opportunity to reform the courts to better suit their own goals and ideals, although

they must overcome opposition from other Dharmas and factions to do so.

- **Song of the Shadow:** The separation of the worlds is devastating to the Bone Flowers, who are cut off from the Yin World and the voices of the ghosts who advise and guide them. Many Bone Flower arhats and masters disappear into the Yin World before the Wall rises too high. The Bone Flowers that remain attempt to deal with the changes in their usual dispassionate and efficient manner, but the ranks of the Dharma are depleted and the Cold Mind favored by the Song of the Shadow grows brittle under the stress of the Sixth Age.

- **Path of a Thousand Whispers:** More than any other Fivefold Dharma, the Rootless Trees disappear *en masse* from the Middle Kingdom. Rumors abound that the Wise Centipedes have merely gone into hiding, using their skill in subterfuge and disguise to conceal themselves. Others claim they have found the way to enlightenment at last, completing the lessons of their thousand different lives, or that they have fled into the spirit worlds and are now trapped on the far side of the Wall, beyond the reach of any in the Middle Kingdom. The Rootless Trees that remain continue to pursue their own agendas, as always.

- **Dance of the Thrashing Dragon:** The Thrashing Dragons are perhaps the least affected by the changes of the Sixth Age. Although loss of contact with the Yang World is troubling, it allows followers to focus their attention on the material world, something they are inclined to do anyway. The thinning of the Dharma's ranks is not as pronounced as others' (either because the Thrashing Dragons had fewer ancestors or *akuma* than was claimed). The greatest challenge faced by the Golden Courts comes from demon hunters stalking Kuei-jin, which can easily erupt into open war.

- **Flame of the Rising Phoenix:** As the Wall grows and the spirit worlds drift away, Kuei-jin in the Infinite Thunders Court note that followers disappear in increasing numbers. The masters of the Flame of the Rising Phoenix vanish without a trace, but always after making arrangements and provisions for their mortal relations. Assumptions spread that they have achieved enlightenment and left the material world. Others claim elders have reincarnated and returned to the Wheel, having expurgated the Karma that weighed them down into Yomi. Even more scandalous are claims that some junior members of the Dharma have actually become *mortal* again. Although all such Phoenixes died shortly thereafter, they died ordinary, mortal deaths, and many believe their souls have passed beyond the reach of Yomi. Such stories can inspire other Kuei-jin to abandon their Dharmas in favor of the Rising Phoenix. A story could be dedicated to a *wu* trying to regain its humanity and the chance for a mortal death.

- **Tempest of the Inward Focus:** The balance of this Dharma becomes virtual paralysis in the face of the Sixth Age. Followers of the Tempest, unwilling to compromise their carefully cultivated existence, remain aloof to the political struggles of the courts, while espousing their beliefs to any who care to heed them. Unfortunately, others are not as willing to allow these heretics to stand by

the wayside. They are the targets of demon hunters and other Kuei-jin.

- **Face of the Gods:** Many of the Divine Ones vanish from the Middle Kingdom, leaving cults run by young followers of the Dharma. These new leaders proclaim that their elders have ascended to Heaven on the prayers of the faithful. Denied access to the spirit world, young gods struggle amongst themselves for control of their cults and a shrinking number of mortal faithful. Being somewhat high profile, they also face some of the fiercest attacks from demon hunters and Kuei-jin such as the Devil Tigers, who are whipped up into crusades against heresy.

- **Spirit of the Living Earth:** The Age of Sorrow sees the end of the Cerulean Veils altogether. The followers of this Dharma walk paths into the spirit worlds before the Wall gets too high. Or cut off from the *kamui* and any opportunity for enlightenment, they choose Final Death, facing the Eye of Heaven or otherwise committing *seppuku*, sometimes in small groups in hopes of releasing their spirits from their mortal corpses and passing beyond the Wall.

- **The Scorpion Eaters:** The Scorpion Eaters adapt well to the demands of the Sixth Age. Without the Yama Kings or the spirit worlds to trouble them, they delight in the chaos brought about in the courts and seize any and every opportunity for power and influence. Their greatest challenge is that they become the focus of many *akuma* hunters and mortal demon hunters. Still, the Scorpion Eaters have dealt with both before. They believe the Sixth Age is their time, stripped of the pretensions of spirituality, when they will be free to use their powers to satisfy their every desire.

THE BARRED GATES OF HELL

Perhaps the most important effect of the Wall's growth is that it closes off more than just the Yin and Yang Worlds. Like the Great Wall protecting China from the invasion of barbarians, it closes the Middle Kingdom off from the Yomi World, forever. The Yama Kings and their demons are barred from influencing material reality any further. Their *akuma* servants are either drawn into Hell to serve their masters there for all time, or are abandoned to their fate (which is inevitable Final Death at the hands of former enemies). Although one of the Yama Kings must assume the throne of the Demon Emperor as foretold, the hosts of Yomi Wan are no longer a threat to the world.

Of course, this also means that no souls return from beyond the Wall to inhabit their corpses and rise as Hungry Dead. From the moment the gates of Hell close, no more Kuei-jin arise in the world and no more will ever arise. The Wan Kuei are the last of their kind. If mortal souls are still drawn into Yomi upon their deaths, none of them return to tell of it.

THE HAMMER FALLS

Disarray among Kuei-jin courts does not go unnoticed. The growth of the Wall and the increased need for Chi that it creates among elders attracts the attention of those aware of the Kuei-jin, notably the Shih and western

Kindred. Both see the opportunity to seize upon their enemy's weakness. With so many bodhisattvas and arhats gone, the enemies of the Wan Kuei strike.

- **The Shih:** Demon hunters become increasingly active following the growth of the Wall. The powers of the Shih are not overly affected. As living creatures, their Chi is their own to harness and cultivate. In fact, the Shih become more of a threat to the Kuei-jin, since the vampires lose a measure of their own power. If the rising Wall is merely the first sign of all supernatural forces fading from the world (see below), the Shih eventually lose their powers as well, but not before they inflict as much damage as they can against the Kuei-jin.

- **Strike Force Zero:** Like the Shih, Strike Force Zero becomes increasingly active as the remaining Kuei-jin are weakened by the loss of elders and their connection to the spirit worlds. SFO agents follow up on reports of increased Kuei-jin hunting and other activity, and take full advantage of the disarray. Depending on how you intend to end this story, Strike Force Zero may simply be another threat posed to the diminished Kuei-jin, or a significant agent of change (see below).

- **The Kin-jin:** Largely unaware of the spirit worlds and rooted solely in the material, the Kin-jin notice the growth of the Wall only because it limits the power of their Cathayan adversaries. Western vampires take the offensive once more, and eastern vampires have little choice but to fall back. The Great Leap Outward is abandoned along with Kuei-jin possessions in North America.

CONCLUSIONS

You can take this end scenario in several different directions, depending on the outcome you prefer. The Sixth Age can spell the end of the Kuei-jin and all supernatural forces in the World of Darkness. Or it might mean a significant change only in the world and the existence of the Hungry Dead.

RATS IN THE WALLS

Once the Wall cuts off contact with the spirit worlds, things may settle into a new status quo among surviving supernatural beings. True, no more Kuei-jin take the Second Breath, and most of the *shen* are gone, but the vampires that remain are still immortal. Even faced with demon hunters and other enemies, they can survive for quite some time, continuing to follow their Dharmas and their own agendas, while reconstructing Kuei-jin society as best they can. Survival can lead to a new and different **Kindred of the East** chronicle in which Kuei-jin are not so numerous or powerful in a world from which they slowly fade.

Alternatively, the rise of the Wall may be the beginning of the end for the Kuei-jin as they are hunted down and destroyed. Without the power to escape into the spirit worlds, forced to steal Chi from other creatures, with no new Kuei-jin to replace them, the surviving Wan Kuei are the last of their kind. A concerted effort on the part of the Shih, Strike Force Zero, the Kin-jin, *chi'n ta* or some combination of Cathayan enemies could wipe them out.

FADING AWAY

The rise of the Wall might be the first sign of ultimate victory for Strike Force Zero and the Zaibatsu. Namely, the elimination of all supernatural forces in the world. Loss of the spirit worlds and rarified *shen* are just the first steps. The Kuei-jin lose the ability to drain Chi by breath, and Disciplines become less reliable and effective. Then they cannot drain Chi by blood, but must eat flesh. Soon, not even that provides sustenance, and the Demon People of the Middle Kingdom starve until they are forced from existence like the forgotten myths they have become. The world is left safe for humanity, the sole survivors of the Age of Sorrow.

FURTHER STORIES

Events in “The Rising of One Hundred Clouds” open up some possibilities for chronicles set in a Sixth Age, in which the Kuei-jin (and other *shen*) are reduced to a tiny handful, struggling to exist in a world that no longer believes in them. Their powers are diminished, as is their influence, although characters no longer need to deal with the structure of the courts or with elders. They also know there will be no other ghosts or Hungry Dead. A chronicle set some time after the coming of the Age of Sorrow may feature a *wu* made up of the only remaining Kuei-jin in the world, the very last of their kind.

SERPENT BITES THE HAND

The struggle between East and West, between the Kuei-jin and the Kindred, has been a theme of **Kindred of the East** from the very beginning. The conflict heated up with the Great Leap Outward and the Two-Fang Serpent Plan that sent Kuei-jin to the west coast of North America, where they seized control of Los Angeles and San Francisco. The invasion provoked a shadow war between the eastern and western vampires. Now, with the coming of the Sixth Age, that war draws to a fateful conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

The Tremere clan of Kin-jin has become the focus of the conflict between the Kuei-jin and the Camarilla. Not only have the Tremere been instrumental in the Camarilla’s counterstrikes against the invading Cathayans, but Tremere Oliver Thrace has also apparently betrayed the Camarilla to the Quincunx in order to save his own skin. That violation has placed certain Kindred secrets in Cathayan hands and given them an advantage over their western enemies. But the Kuei-jin have underestimated Oliver Thrace. Their error in judgment will cost them and the world dearly.

Thrace has used his time as a “guest” of the Quincunx to study the Kuei-jin and learn about them. He has discovered how the Asian vampires come into being through a descent into Yomi and a return to the world when they take the Second Breath. More importantly, Thrace has reached out to the Yama Kings and made a devil’s bargain. He has pledged service to Yomi in exchange for the means to ensure permanent defeat of the Kuei-jin.

With Thrace’s aid, the Tremere perform a powerful ritual that severs ties between the Kuei-jin and the material world, banishing the Cathayans back to Yomi and preventing any new souls from taking the Second Breath. The Kuei-jin are decimated and in danger of becoming extinct as the ritual spreads. The Kindred have won, but they have also been deceived. The destruction of the Kuei-jin and the collection of so many powerful souls grants the Yama Kings what they need to open the gates of the Yomi World. The Tremere become the *akuma* pawns of the Thousand Hells, with Oliver Thrace as agent of the Demon Emperor. The Kindred can either bow to their new master or be hunted down and destroyed along with his other enemies.

WHISPERS FROM HELL

Oliver Thrace (from **World of Darkness: Hong Kong**) has studied the Kuei-jin for a considerable time. Chosen to head the Hong Kong Chantry of the Tremere, Thrace seized the opportunity to learn more about the mysterious Cathayans and their arcane secrets. He also concealed the fact that he studied diabolism and Dark Thaumaturgy from his clan’s elders. His position with the Hong Kong Chantry afforded him an excellent opportunity to experiment away from the watchful eyes of his superiors. Eventually, Thrace discovered the existence of the Yama Kings and rituals that allowed him to contact them. He negotiated with both Mikaboshi and Tou Mu for arcane knowledge and power, believing he could play the two demons against each other.

When the conflict between the Kuei-jin and the Kindred in Hong Kong escalated, Thrace was faced with a difficult choice. If he fled with the other Kindred, he would lose his opportunity to learn more about the Kuei-jin and he risked his infernal studies being exposed. If he remained, there was a danger that the Kuei-jin would destroy him once he’d outlived his usefulness. Thrace decided to risk danger and bargained with the Kuei-jin of the Blood Court for sanctuary in exchange for information about the Kindred. They agreed, and the Tremere warlock defected to the Quincunx to become an “honored guest.”

Since then, Oliver Thrace has played a precarious game. He has provided his Kuei-jin hosts with enough information to ensure that he is useful to them, but not so much that the Kuei-jin can overwhelm the Camarilla too quickly or decide that they don’t need him any longer. He has also studied the Cathayans closely, and learned all that he can about them. Most importantly, he has quietly drawn the attention of *akuma* within the Blood Court. They recognize in Thrace an opportunity foretold in prophecy that may seal the victory of the Yama Kings.

At the beginning of the scenario, Thrace makes his pact with the Yama Kings, engineers his escape from the Quincunx, and makes his triumphant return to the Camarilla with the secret of how to eliminate the Cathayans, once and for all.

RISE OF THE WHITE DEVIL

How early the characters get involved with Oliver Thrace depends on their relationship with the Tremere and with the August Courts of the Quincunx. If Thrace is already a recurring character in your chronicle, the characters may be involved when he finally plays his hand. This scenario is particularly appropriate if Thrace has been a regular antagonist for the characters.

If the *wu* has not encountered Thrace before, or members are not in the good graces of the Quincunx, you need to introduce the characters to the Ventrue and the threat that he poses. There are a number of ways to do so.

- **Investigating Thrace:** The Quincunx may assign the characters the task of guarding, interrogating or watching Thrace, allowing them to learn something of his plans. The mandarins of the August Courts expect treachery from the *gweilo* vampire, just not in the measure that he has planned. The *wu* may be told to get more information from Thrace to support the Great Leap Outward. They may have the duty of guarding Thrace against assassins trying to destroy him. Maybe one of those would-be assassins knows something of the Tremere's plans and reveals it to the characters to win their complicity. Finally, the *wu* may have the task of investigating Thrace's activities, discovering forbidden texts in his quarters or evidence of arcane rituals performed

there, perhaps even notes for the ritual that can be pieced together to reveal the warlock's plans. Also consider that corruption has grown deep roots in the Quincunx. Any one or more of the elders who assign the *wu* its task may be in league with Thrace and the Yama Kings.

- **Demon Hunting:** The *wu* might approach matters from the other side, working to root out *akuma* and the growing influence of the Yama Kings in the August Courts. They may do so as agents of the ancestors or as outsiders seeking to restore the courts to proper balance. When they find and eliminate a nest of *akuma*, they discover evidence of a plan involving Oliver Thrace. They pursue the information just as Thrace makes his move and leaves the hospitality of the Quincunx. Depending on how the characters investigate, they may have the best opportunity to pursue the Tremere, or they might be interpreted as his accomplices and detained long enough for him to make good his escape.

- **Pawns in the Game:** To give the characters an even greater stake in the matter, they could be pawns whom Thrace intends to use to win freedom. The warlock may contact the characters, telling them some plausible lie to get them to help him, such as offering to aid whatever Kuei-jin faction they favor (while embarrassing the Quincunx), or giving them clear evidence of *akuma* activity within the August Courts (which, in a way, he



will). He may even set things up to look like he's returning to the Camarilla as a double agent for the Kuei-jin, going with the ancestors' blessing. The key is to convince the characters that they should help Thrace escape and return to his clan. When his treachery is revealed, they have a personal stake in stopping Thrace's plans: restoring their own honor.

THRACE'S ESCAPE

Once the characters are introduced to Oliver Thrace (and possibly the danger he poses to the Kuei-jin), the Tremere escapes from the Quincunx and makes his way back to his clanmates. Thrace's means of escape is up to you. What's important is that he escapes before anyone can prevent it, although the characters may pursue once they discover that he's gone. Some potential routes include:

- **Rescue:** Thrace is freed with the aid of others, either *akuma* accomplices within the August Courts or Kin-jin agents, possibly both. The Kindred believe they rescue Thrace from the clutches of the Cathayans to ensure that no further information is leaked. They intend to bring Thrace back to find out how much he has told the enemy, and what he knows about them that the Camarilla can use. This approach may lead Kuei-jin characters to believe that Thrace's escape is merely part of the ongoing struggle between the Kuei-jin and Kindred, rather than part of a more sinister plot.

- **Ritual:** Thrace may use any of a number of rituals or vampiric Disciplines to aid his escape. He may augment his powers of Obfuscate to the point that he can simply walk away with no one the wiser. He may use a rite that allows him to step into a shadow and disappear, or change his form to allow him to slip away in disguise (perhaps even disguised as one of the players' characters, giving them good reason to investigate). Characters can find evidence of the ritual Thrace uses to get an idea of how he escaped.

- **The Spirit World:** Thrace uses a ritual to step into the spirit world, most likely the Yin World, and makes his way out of Kuei-jin custody unnoticed. He may receive aid from *akuma* within the August Courts to do so. They provide a distraction or ensure that the path Thrace takes is free of any obstacles. Characters who pursue Thrace can try to follow his trail in the spirit world, encountering its denizens along the way.

- **The Yomi World:** His alliance with the Yama Kings may permit Thrace to open a portal into Yomi to escape, traveling through the depths of Hell to return safely to the world. This route makes the Tremere warlock virtually impossible to follow, except by the most experienced and powerful Kuei-jin. Characters may quickly determine Thrace's true loyalties, or they might believe that agents of the Yama Kings abducted the Tremere. In either case, the involvement of Yomi is revealed fairly early on and the characters have to wonder what this most inauspicious portent means.

- **Spiritual Transfer:** Only Thrace's spirit escapes from the Kuei-jin, not his body. The Tremere warlock uses Thaumaturgy to transfer his essence into an object

and arranges to have it smuggled to allies elsewhere. The *wu* may be Thrace's chosen agents, transporting his essence out of the Middle Kingdom and into the hands of the Tremere. Alternatively, they may be assigned the task of finding something stolen from Thrace's haven after his sudden and mysterious demise, leading them to discover that Thrace has actually escaped. Thrace inhabits a new body provided by the Tremere. Choose the new host to suit your chronicle, although a former enemy, ally or loved one of a character is a good choice.

CHASING THRACE

Characters may pursue Thrace following his escape. If the *wu* guarded Thrace or inadvertently aided his escape, members may go after him out of duty. If the characters follow clues that lead them to Thrace right before he escapes, they may pursue him because they have some idea of the danger he poses. Finally, ancestors may assign the characters' *wu* the task of finding Thrace and destroying him before he can reveal all that he knows to the Kin-jin (or worse, if they have some inkling of Thrace's true allegiance and intentions).

Where Thrace flees and how much of the chase to play out is up to the needs of your chronicle. The pursuit is likely to take place in short hops, with the vampires seeking shelter from the sun by day and traveling by night. It can be a drawn-out journey if it takes place overland, or be a relatively short plane trip to a foreign land. The point is that Thrace leaves the Middle Kingdom for some place where the Camarilla (particularly the Tremere) is strong, such as Europe or North America. The characters are on foreign soil and in enemy territory. They need to intercept Thrace before he reaches a safe haven.

Ideally, the characters come close to catching Thrace, but he leaves traps, distractions and minions on his trail to delay them long enough for him to escape. These dangers can further implicate the warlock in an alliance with *akuma* and the Yama Kings. You can even have the characters catch up to Thrace and capture or destroy him, believing that they have succeeded. They later discover that they eliminated a decoy or that Thrace's spirit survived and now possesses a new host, allowing him to continue his plans (see "Spiritual Transfer").

This is a good point for a break in the story. Thrace has either escaped the characters or they believe they've dealt with him. After laying the foundation for forthcoming events, it may be worthwhile to play out a few other stories, with additional portents of the coming storm, allowing time for Thrace and the Tremere to prepare their dire ritual.

And then the Kuei-jin begin to fall.

THE SCREAMING PLAGUE

Oliver Thrace teaches the essentials of the Ritual of Breaking the Demon Bonds to other Tremere, or at least enough of it to convince them that the ritual can work and that they need him to perform it properly. Eager to eliminate the Kuei-jin threat, the Camarilla grants Thrace permission to conduct the rite, beginning in the occupied

REPLACING THRACE

It's possible that another fate has already befallen Oliver Thrace in your chronicle. He may have met his destruction at the hands of the characters, the Quincunx or his fellow Tremere. Or you might not want to use Thrace as the prime mover in this story for any number of reasons. You can substitute another character, filling the same overall role in the story. Good potential substitutes include Wan Zhu, Thrace's child who defected to the Quincunx. She might be corrupted by the Yama Kings (or perhaps even possessed by Thrace's spirit if his corporeal body is destroyed). Luna Demain, the Tremere Regent in San Francisco, and her protégé Martin Franckel, both of whom diligently study the Kuei-jin, are possibilities. The *akuma* Chan Te of the Hollow City *wu* is another candidate, although he is more suitable as an emissary from Mikaboshi, offering assistance to the Camarilla. These characters are detailed in *San Francisco by Night*. You may also have another suitable Tremere character in your chronicle who can be used.

areas of California. The ritual breaks the ties holding Kuei-jin to their mortal corpses, sending them back into Yomi exile. To observers in the material world, the Kuei-jin simply keel over and rot away, their spirits dragged screaming back to Hell. The Wan Kuei call this the Screaming Plague, and find that no defense is sufficient against it. Kuei-jin meet Final Death by the dozens, then the hundreds, as the Tremere perform the ritual and its power expands.

DRAGGED INTO HELL

The characters should be among the first to witness the effects of the Screaming Plague. They may be in San Francisco or Los Angeles on other business when the Tremere ritual strikes, perhaps even following a lead that Thrace is in the area.

The characters are in the presence of other Kuei-jin, perhaps elders welcoming them to the city or who hear a report of the *wu*'s activities. Suddenly one of the Kuei-jin convulses, screams in agony and collapses. The corpse rots into dust almost immediately. Then another collapses, and another. Fortunately for the characters (but unfortunately for Kuei-jin at large), the Tremere ritual is most effective against elder Cathayans who carry the greatest weight of years upon them. So, the first vampires destroyed are the oldest in the city, throwing everything into chaos as young mandarins and jina are forced to assume control, only to eventually fall victim to the same fate.

The characters are left without the guidance of ancestors, but do have the opportunity to take charge of the situation, if they can. There is little they can do except try to find out what's happening and to help organize an evacuation of remaining Kuei-jin. (The ritual destroys the eldest vampires on the first night, then slowly builds

until no Kuei-jin can survive in the area.) Young vampires manifest signs such as permanent Yin imbalance (*Kindred of the East*, p. 139) after the first day. Even the youngest Kuei-jin in the city is destroyed after seven days.

What happens next depends on what the characters do. They may try to find a way of stopping the Tremere ritual, they may seek a cure or defense against the Screaming Plague, or they may be willing to bargain with one of the Yama Kings to ensure their own survival (and/or that of their kind).

QUINCUNX COUNTERSTRIKE

If the characters believe (correctly) that Oliver Thrace and the Tremere are responsible for the Screaming Plague, they may try to stop the Kin-jin. Kuei-jin may discover the origin of the plague through their own rituals or occult knowledge. Means of overcoming the rite is a far more complicated matter, particularly given the loss of so many ancestors and mandarins. By the time the remaining Kuei-jin figure out a defense, it may be too late.

One possibility is to strike against the Tremere and stop them from continuing the ritual. The Kuei-jin may make a concerted effort to launch an attack on every Tremere chantry that they can reach. The primary problem is that the ritual has an extensive reach and the Tremere are well guarded by their Camarilla allies, who intend to buy them time to wipe out the Cathayans. So, any attack on a chantry has to be well coordinated and quick, and Kuei-jin face Kin-jin defenders.

This response allows you to run some battle scenes between the Kuei-jin and their enemies. Out of desperation to survive, the Kuei-jin may even ignore the usual efforts to hide from the mortal world, compromising the existence of vampires among mortals.

DEVIL'S BARGAIN

While remaining Kuei-jin don't have the time or the means to create a defense against the Tremere ritual, they do have one option: bargaining with the Yama Kings who gave Thrace the rite in the first place. Striking a deal requires the *wu* to travel into Yomi or to summon a Yama King to Earth, neither of which is a particularly easy task. They can try to negotiate a bargain with the Yama Kings

SURVIVAL OF THE YOUNGEST

If you plan to continue a *Kindred of the East* chronicle after the events of this story, you may allow the characters to avert the full effects of the ritual and have some Kuei-jin escape destruction. In this case, the chronicle resembles the situation described in "The Rising of the Hundred Clouds," with young generations surviving, but without elders or any new Kuei-jin coming into existence. You can easily base a new chronicle on a *wu* struggling to restore order to what's left of the Middle Kingdom. Perhaps the characters are among the oldest and most experienced (and also the last) of their kind.

who gave Thrace the ritual (Mikaboshi and Tou Mu), or they can contact one (or more) of the other Yama Kings.

The latter is the characters' best chance, since the other kings are concerned that the ritual will ensure Mikaboshi and Tou Mu of victory. One of the other kings can give the characters a counter-measure to the ritual, but they must perform it in one of the Tremere ritual circles. It doesn't reverse the effects of the ritual, but it does ensure that the Tremere can no longer maintain the Screaming Plague, and it saves remaining Kuei-jin from Final Death. The Yama King doesn't even ask anything in return, claiming that the opportunity to disrupt a rival's plans is enough. (That isn't the entire truth, of course.)

Ideally, the characters disrupt a ritual orchestrated by Thrace. That way they get to watch him burst into flames and burn to ash, followed by his fellows, when the power of the characters' rite is unleashed. Unfortunately for the characters, the souls of all the Tremere become the property of one of the Yama Kings, which serves much the same purpose as the original ritual. It does, however, mean that some Kuei-jin continue to exist to see the coming of the Sixth Age.

Mikaboshi and Tou Mu aren't inclined to help the characters unless something worthwhile is offered. Characters willing to pledge themselves to the service of the Yama Kings may receive mercy and the means to disrupt the Tremere ritual, as above. Alternatively, the Yama Kings may simply toy with the Kuei-jin until it's too late for them to do anything and the characters are trapped in Yomi by the Tremere ritual. Since the characters are trapped along with their physical bodies, they may be able to escape and return to Earth, making them the last remaining Kuei-jin (at least, the last not under the domination of the Yama Kings).

WHAT IF THE CHARACTERS DO NOTHING?

If the characters are simply clueless about the cause of the Screaming Plague, or choose to do nothing about it, you have several options. You can give the players hints to guide them in the right direction or you can simply let them do whatever they want in response to the decimation of their kind. It's possible that ambitious jina see this as an opportunity to seize power, although they should realize that they are not necessarily immune to the Screaming Plague. Playing out the struggles of a *wu* making a power play as the world crumbles could be interesting.

If you want to encourage the characters to act against the Tremere, you can offer them clues. They may discover or decipher some of Thrace's notes on the Ritual of Breaking the Demon Bonds. A dying *akuma* may mock them with the imminent victory of its master. A dying elder Kuei-jin may discover something and manage to gasp it while rotting away before the characters' eyes. In any case, do whatever is the most interesting and enjoyable for your chronicle.

RAISED UPON TEN THOUSAND SOULS

The purpose of the Ritual of Breaking the Demon Bonds is actually threefold. It allows the Tremere to eliminate the Kuei-jin, sending their souls to Yomi. But it also puts the souls of destroyed Kuei-jin into the hands of Mikaboshi and Tou Mu, greatly increasing their power. And it corrupts the Tremere and binds their souls into the service of the Yama Kings. As the ritual nears its conclusion (marked by the destruction of all Kuei-jin), the Sixth Age dawns and the Yama Kings come to claim their rightful throne.

The Tremere chantries where the ritual is performed become broken mirrors, gateways into the Yomi World. The fabric of the Wall is ripped by the passage of so many Kuei-jin torn from their corpses and cast back into Hell. Corrupt Chi wells up from these sores, spreading outward. The Tremere are the first to be corrupted by it, and they become demonically tainted servants of the Yama Kings, but that's only the beginning.

Nearly invisible waves of corrupt Chi spread a pall across the world. Despair and corruption intensify. Riots and small wars break out as mortals are influenced by Yomi. Violence and crime skyrocket. The authorities respond with increasingly brutal countermeasures. Despite their best efforts, supernatural beings such as the Kindred can do nothing to stop this surge of destruction. In fact, they're caught up in it as child rebels against elder, anarchy against Camarilla, all turning on each other like rabid dogs.

The characters may still try to stem the tide of Yomi's victory. They may be able to seal one of the hellgates, whether with a ritual of their own or through self-sacrifice. If they're successful, they create a small island of untainted Chi, which might become a stronghold to oppose the Yama Kings. Otherwise, the place is merely a fading remnant of the Fifth Age that eventually yields to the inevitable.

As the violence peaks, Yomi floods into the world. Hordes of demons and ghosts are loosed. Millions die at the hands of creatures from Hell, and their souls swell the ranks of the Yama Kings' armies. The Sixth Age comes and the victorious Yama King (that with the greatest number of souls reaped from the rituals) claims the title of Demon Emperor, ruling over the world until the Wheel of Ages turns once more.

FURTHER STORIES

Although this story spells the end of the Fifth Age, it does not necessarily have to spell the end of your chronicle, particularly if the characters survive the events of Yomi's rise. "Serpent Bites the Hand" can be the beginning of an entirely new chronicle set in a future world dominated by the Yama Kings, with players assuming the roles of the few surviving Kuei-jin who struggle against the Demon Emperor and his servants. Alternatively, the characters could be Shih, the last defenders of humanity who seek to overthrow the tyrant Yama Kings (or perhaps to form an alliance with the remaining Wan Kuei to accomplish the same).

You can run a long-term chronicle of survival and rebellion in the Sixth Age, or even a story that culminates in victory over the Yama Kings, ushering in a new turning of the Wheel of Ages and starting the cycle all over again.

GAME INFORMATION

This section covers the game information needed to run “Serpent Bites the Hand.” You may wish to flesh out this material using information from other *Kindred of the East* or *World of Darkness* sourcebooks. In particular, *World of Darkness: Hong Kong* and *San Francisco by Night* provide useful background information on the personalities involved here (although many of them may meet their end early on).

OLIVER THRACE

Background: To all accounts, Oliver Thrace was the ideal Tremere, a reputation that earned him his place as head of the clan’s Hong Kong Chantry. In truth, Thrace has practiced Dark Thaumaturgy for some time, with ambitions far beyond what any of his elders suspected. He chose to betray his clan and the Camarilla for the opportunity to learn more about Cathayans and the Yama Kings. Now he’s prepared to sacrifice the Kuei-jin — and anyone else — on the altar of his ambition.

Image: Thrace is a tall, distinguished gentleman, with broad shoulders and a thick head of silvery hair. His face is rugged and stern, emphasized by the scar that runs down his right cheek, and by the black patch over his right eye. He dresses in a formal western style with a touch of eastern flare, and always carries a gnarled, silver-tipped cane.

Roleplaying Hints: Outwardly, you are cool, collected, intellectual and charming. Inwardly, you are cruel and ruthless, a seething pool of rage kept tightly under control except when you choose to unleash it. There is no limit to your ambition nor to the lengths to which you are willing to go to achieve your goals: power and wealth beyond your wildest dreams.



Clan: Tremere

Nature: Bravo

Demeanor: Autocrat

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 1496

Apparent Age: 40

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 6, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 6

Abilities: Alertness 5, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 4, Etiquette 2, Finance 5, Firearms 2, Intimidation 6, Leadership 3, Linguistics 6, Melee 4, Occult 3, Politics 4, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 4

Disciplines: Auspex 6, Dominate 6, Fortitude 2, Necromancy 4, Obfuscate 4, Potence 4, Thaumaturgy 6 (Blood 5, Elemental Mastery 5, Lure of Flames 5, Movement of Mind 4, Spirit Thaumaturgy 5), Thaumaturgy (Dark) 4

Rituals: Thrace knows most of the rituals for his level of Thaumaturgy, although he specializes in summoning and binding spirits and ghosts.

Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Influence 4, Resources 5, Retainers 5

Virtues: Conscience 0, Self-Control 2, Courage 4

Humanity: 2

Willpower: 10

THE TRUMPET OF MOUNT MERU

According to legend, the Wan Kuei or Ten Thousand Demons are the spiritual descendents of the Wan Xian, the Ten Thousand Immortals who served the August Personage of Jade in previous Ages of the world. When the Wan Xian abandoned their appointed duties and abused their power, the August Personage took away their ability to breathe, forcing them to subsist on Chi stolen from others, making them parasites. Now, in the dawning of the Sixth Age, the noble heritage of the Wan Xian is nothing but a dim memory for the Kuei-jin. It soon becomes something more, though, as the final battle for the Age is joined.

INTRODUCTION

The common belief among Kuei-jin is that the August Personage of Jade, the Celestial Emperor, has turned his face from the Middle Kingdom as the Age of Sorrow draws near. The Celestial Emperor must give way to the Demon Emperor of the Sixth Age. That is the way of things. This is true, but the August Personage has not abandoned the fight altogether. Quite the contrary. The Celestial Emperor intends that the Age of Sorrow will not come cheaply, and the traitorous descendants of the fallen Wan Xian will not be around to see it.

Toward that end, the August Personage empowers the Shih demon hunters, making them the equal of the legendary Wan Xian. These new Righteous Warriors of

Heaven are set to cleanse the world of the Hungry Dead, and they fight to the last to hold off the forces of the Yama Kings. It is a last stand against darkness, to show that the light will not fade quietly from the world.

This story is equally usable for Kuei-jin characters from a *Kindred of the East* chronicle or Shih characters (from the *Demon Hunter X* sourcebook), or both, if you wish. The *Demon Hunter X* sourcebook is useful but not essential for running this end scenario.

ANSWERING THE CALL OF HEAVEN

The story begins with the Shih, mortals gifted with the power of Chi to hunt demons and the Kuei-jin. While their powers have always been formidable, the Shih have never been particularly numerous, nor the equal of the most powerful of the Wan Kuei. That's about to change.

The power of the Shih grows, and with it comes reports of demon hunters versed in lore about the Hungry Dead, and bold in strikes against the Kuei-jin. What was once a nuisance for the August Courts becomes a matter of grave importance.

The "Game Information" section describes changes to Shih capabilities. Essentially, demon hunters have

more Chi at their disposal, which continues to grow over time. They also gain access to high levels of supernatural capabilities. Along with these powers comes the willingness and inspiration to strike at the Kuei-jin and other *shen* in ways the Shih have scarcely dared before. In the initial week or two of the story, news of increasingly active hunters reaches the August Courts of the Quincunx and the other courts of Kuei-jin.

KUEI-JIN CHARACTERS

A Kuei-jin *wu* may take interest in the activities of demon hunters, particularly if ordered to. They may be among the first to feel the power of the Shih when a lone but empowered demon hunter attacks them. A capable *wu* should be able to deal with the Shih, even with the hunter's increased Chi, but the fight is difficult enough for them to wonder — and fear — what the Shih at large might be planning.

SHIH CHARACTERS

Demon hunters notice an increased feeling of vitality, wellbeing and strength of purpose. Even the most cynical and jaded discover newfound energy and direction. Some Shih even experience dreams of a war against an assembled



host of monstrous *shen*, and hear the sound of a distant trumpet calling them to battle. They may dismiss the dreams at first, but when they talk to others of their kind they discover that the visions common to them all.

In addition to their increased power, circumstances seem to draw the Shih together to the same places at the same times, allowing them to meet and share their experiences. This is a good opportunity to get a disparate group of characters together, allowing them to take on a *wu* of Kuei-jin or group of *shen* with their increased power, and to discuss what they think it means.

HUNTER CHARACTERS

Storytellers may wish to involve imbued characters from **Hunter: The Reckoning** in this story. They can be included alongside the Shih. Hunters' Conviction and edges are increased similar to the Chi and Qiao of the Shih, giving them a considerable boost in power and allowing them to use their capabilities more freely. Hunters may ultimately serve the same cause as the Shih, making them comrades in the final battle against monstrous *shen* of all stripes.

See Chapter 3 for more ideas on stories involving the imbued that you can weave into your **Kindred of the East** finale.

HEAVEN THUNDER HAMMER

After a few initial strikes, Shih activity increases considerably, and so does their power. As the weeks pass, it becomes increasingly obvious that the demon hunters are more than just bold. They wield power to rival that of the great arhats and bodhisattvas of the Wan Kuei. Perhaps the mortals have even more. Demon hunters stalk and destroy *wu* and disrupt the very fabric of Kuei-jin society.

KUEI-JIN CHARACTERS

The Shih are no longer a curiosity or annoyance but a serious threat to the society of the Demon People. Kuei-jin characters can encounter evidence of the Shih threat in a number of ways, and may take steps to try and deal with it, either on their own or under the guidance of elders. Some possible encounters and activities for Kuei-jin characters include:

- Stalking known Shih and keeping tabs on their activities. This approach allows characters to witness the demon hunters' handiwork without being destroyed, so long as they're careful not to be detected. They may spy on various Shih and discover that the hunters gather in groups, working in pairs and trios that cross paths with and join larger groups. This cooperation allows the hunters to pool resources and capabilities, and to take on ever-greater opponents.

- The characters may narrowly survive an assault by one or more Shih. The demon hunters pursue the vampires tirelessly, with inhuman determination. The

Kuei-jin must find a safe haven without leading the Shih right to the secret strongholds of the courts (which is exactly what the demon hunters hope for). Maybe the characters attempt to lay a trap for their pursuers and turn the tables on them.

- A *wu* is assigned to go to a noted library (such as in the Bone Court of Chongqing) to find ancient texts about battles with the Shih. Elders seek a precedent for the power the Shih wield, and a means of dealing with it. Of course, other Kuei-jin and *shen* are interested in this information and a large group of empowered Shih chooses the time of the characters' visit to stage an assault. The *wu* might be able to escape with documents detailing the epic battle between the demon Mu Tong Pok and four Shih led by the legendary God Slayer. The battle was fought outside the Forbidden City some 400 years ago.

- In an unprecedented move, a *wu* of Kuei-jin is sent to negotiate with some of the Shih in hopes of ending the mortals' attacks. The demon hunters agree to a meeting in good faith, and do not intend to betray the emissaries, but they also make it abundantly clear that they do not intend to negotiate. They want the characters to deliver an ultimatum to the courts. The Kuei-jin have a choice. They can renounce unlife and accept Final Death of their own free will, or the Righteous Warriors of Heaven will destroy them. The demon hunters are filled with a fanaticism the likes of which the Kuei-jin have never seen. The Warriors caution that the end of the Age is near.

SHIH CHARACTERS

Demon hunters can be involved on the opposite side of the events described for Kuei-jin characters, and may undertake missions of their own, testing their newfound power and preparing for the final confrontation to come. Some possible encounters or activities for Shih characters include:

- Going on increasingly difficult missions against nests of Kuei-jin. Tearing down scarlet screens. Squeezing mortal minions for information. Burning out pockets of infestation, which leads to more information about the strongholds of the Hungry Dead. Some of these missions may be inspired or guided by dreams or visions (particularly for Shih with high ratings in Yu An and Meng Qiao).

- Coordinating the efforts of young and less experienced Shih (for seasoned demon hunters) or overcoming the cynicism and apathy of elders (for young Shih). The characters may try to recruit fellow hunters to work together to stalk and destroy Kuei-jin.

- The demon hunters become the hunted when Kuei-jin assassins target them. Increased power may allow the Shih to fight off these undead, but more come, from stealthy Bone Flowers to fierce Devil Tiger warriors and Wise Centipedes in any of a thousand different guises, all waiting for the ideal time to strike. The attacks show the Shih two things. First, their power increases as they deal with more and more potent Kuei-jin foes. Second, the vampires are *afraid* and want the hunters destroyed before it's too late.

• Guided by visions (and perhaps by the advice of an elderly demon hunter), a group of Shih seeks out the legendary lost tomb of the God Slayer. They might need to acquire ancient documents or maps from the clutches of Kuei-jin scholars, and brave various traps and tests to weed out the unworthy. If they characters are successful, they awaken the greatest of the Shih, the chosen warlord of Heaven, who blows the trumpet of Mount Meru and leads all demon hunters in a final battle against the *shen*.

MORTAL ALLIES

During their struggle, both Shih and Kuei-jin may recruit and work through mortal allies. A sure sign of the end is when conflict between the Hungry Dead and demon hunters spills out into the nighttime streets, in full view of ordinary people. The truth of the midnight world of the *shen* becomes known.

Suddenly, Shih are no longer crazed loners fighting a solitary war against creatures in which no one else believes. Now they're the heroes of ordinary, frightened people who look to them for guidance and leadership. While the Kuei-jin are still able to pull the strings of some mortals, the rest of humanity is either overtaken by shock or rallies to the side of the demon hunters.

If you want, the final confrontation between the Shih and Kuei-jin can include armies of mortal followers, with the most on the side of Heaven's Righteous Warriors. The Shih might have more than ancient and mystical powers at their disposal. They could have strength in numbers and all the modern firepower that their allies can muster.

LAST NIGHTS OF THE WAN KUEI

The struggle comes to a head as the legendary God Slayer returns to lead the Shih against the Ten Thousand Demons. The Kuei-jin must face the Righteous Warriors of Heaven as the Sixth Age dawns.

You can run the final confrontation in several different ways, depending on how you want things to go. The battle may take place all at once or in a series of skirmishes across the Middle Kingdom. It's all-out war or demon hunters pick off the courts, one by one. The fight may take place primarily in the spirit world or in the material world, possibly in full view of mortals, proving the existence of the Kuei-jin and the Shih just in time for the monsters to be wiped out. Or, if you wish, the battle may offer the Kuei-jin the opportunity for redemption before the end.

When the God Slayer awakens from his long slumber, the Shih begin an assault against the Wan Kuei in earnest. Small groups of tremendously powerful hunters strike at will against the courts, leaving nothing but the ashes and dust of destroyed vampires in their wake. Although the Kuei-jin still outnumber demon hunters, the Shih continue to grow in power until they are more than a match for the average vampire, capable of challenging even arhats and bodhisattvas. Their strikes become more focused as the hunters systematically wipe out the Wan Kuei.

The Shih strike at the outer, Green and Golden Courts first. Kuei-jin in China and Japan hear stories of the bloody battles, perhaps from scattered refugees. In Japan, Strike Force Zero steps up operations against the *gaki*. By the time the Japanese demon hunters move against vampires, the Kuei-jin have already been weakened and make easy prey. Then the Shih move against the August Courts.

If battles happen in the open, it's likely that mortal authorities are involved. Even if every effort is taken to conceal the truth, the destruction of the courts has repercussions for a mortal society linked through scarlet screens and human pawns. The Shih may lead growing armies of followers against the Ten Thousand Demons, gaining in strength with each land they liberate from the shadowy dominance of the undead.

The end comes as the Kuei-jin must choose to flee for their unlives or stand their ground and fight the Righteous Warriors of Heaven. Even those Kuei-jin who escape the initial purge are hunted doggedly. It isn't so much a matter of whether Shih will destroy the Kuei-jin, but a matter of where and when. Allow the characters the opportunity to choose the time and place of their destruction, when they come face to face with the empowered Shih.

A FINAL BATTLE

Alternatively, you can skip right over the buildup and move on to a main event in which the Shih and Kuei-jin confront each other in an apocalyptic battle at the end of the Age. This is the time to pull out all the stops for over-the-top *wuxia* action. The Shih cut a swath through the ranks of the Ten Thousand Demons, and the battlefield is littered with ashes and rotting corpses. The characters can go out in a blaze of glory, possibly taking a number of enemies with them. Indeed, they might be among the last Kuei-jin standing, able to make a valiant stand before they too meet Final Death.

If you want to leave the World of Darkness largely untouched, the final battle can take place in the spirit worlds. That setting allows you to chock up all sorts of special effects to the nature of the Mirror Lands. The rest of the world never even knows about the battle fought on the other side of the Wall.

For a twist ending, you can have the Shih offer the Kuei-jin a choice: They can fight against the Righteous Warriors of Heaven and be destroyed, or they can ally themselves with the Shih to fight against the armies of the Yama Kings. Some Kuei-jin accept while others refuse, dividing their ranks and forcing Kuei-jin to fight Kuei-jin to secure the trust of the Shih. Surviving vampires have the opportunity to redeem themselves in the final battle against the legions of Yomi, standing with their backs to the Wall to hold back the tide of the Sixth Age. While it's likely that the characters fail, even with the aid of the empowered Shih, their last stand can be a fitting and heroic end. The gesture might even be fundamental to the redemption and re-creation of the Ten Thousand Immortals in a future Age.

FURTHER STORIES

Other stories along the lines proposed here may involve powerful Shih characters fighting in a world that grows increasingly corrupt under Yama King sway. Although the Shih may manage to wipe out the Kuei-jin, that still leaves many other supernatural threats. You can run a **Demon Hunter X** chronicle in which super-powerful Shih fight to survive in futuristic cities dominated by the various demon lords. Heaven's Warriors may even find the means of bringing an end to the world after it has been corrupted beyond all hope of salvation, starting the Cycle of the Ages anew. Maybe the Shih actually succeed in overthrowing the Yama Kings and restore balance to the world. Afterward they grow complacent and corrupt, though, suffering the curse of the August Personage of Jade and leading to the return of the Kuei-jin and other *shen*. And so the Cycle of Ages continues.

GAME INFORMATION

The following game information is intended for Storytellers running "The Trumpet of Mount Meru."

SHIH POWERS

The demon hunters in this scenario have powers far beyond those normally associated with their kind. The Shih at the end of the Fifth Age gain a tremendous boost to their available Chi, along with an increase in their Qiao or "bridges." Descriptions of the first five levels of Qiao can be found in the **Demon Hunter X** sourcebook.

Chi

A Shih normally has Yin Chi equal to his Self-Control Virtue, and Yang Chi equal to his Courage Virtue. Since all this Chi represents the Shih's life force, spending it takes its toll on his health. Shih lose one health level for every two points of Chi spent. Shih regain Chi at a rate of one point per hour of rest, and regain health levels lost by expending Chi at the same rate.

In this end scenario, that Chi pool is *multiplied* by an increasing factor each week (and that factor can rise quickly or slowly, as you wish). At first it's two, then three and so on until the multiple equals a Shih's permanent Willpower rating. Thus, a demon hunter with Willpower 8 will, after two months, have *eight times* his normal Chi reserves.

This extra Chi is a gift granted by Heaven that comes directly from the environment. Shih do not suffer any damage from spending it. They still suffer health levels of damage for spending Chi from their "personal" pools (amounts equal to or less than their Virtues), but those points are always spent last.

Qiao

Chi fuels the Qiao of the Shih, their special powers. All hunters can use I Shen, Mo Kung and Yu An at the basic (one-dot) level. As the Sixth Age dawns, the Shih develop true mastery of their Qiao, gaining powers beyond those described in **Demon Hunter X**. You may permit Shih players to spend experience to acquire the high levels of Qiao described here, or may even award these

powers to characters as additional gifts from Heaven, allowing the hunters to fight their final war with the *shen*.

I Shen (Bridge of the Celestial Gods)

••••• • **Heaven's Judgment:** The prayers prepared by this Qiao literally burn Chi out of the body of the *shen*, returning that stolen life force to the environment to enliven it. Roll Wits + Occult (difficulty 8) for your character to invoke these prayers, and spend one Yin Chi. There is no defense against this attack. Each success removes one point of Chi from the target's largest Chi pool (Yin or Yang). The Chi leaves the target in a painful burst of black (Yin) or red (Yang) flames, which inflict a number of health levels of lethal damage to the target equal to the Chi points lost. This physical damage cannot be soaked.

••••• •• **Divine Prohibition:** This most powerful of I Shen techniques cuts a target off from outside sources of Chi. Spend one point of Yin and Yang Chi and a point of Willpower, and then roll Wits + Occult (difficulty 8) as your character casts prayer strips that fly straight and true. If your roll is successful, the strips strike, expanding to wrap the target in bands of ghostly writing that bear the Judgment of the August Personage of Jade. Make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) for the *shen*. If the *shen* generates fewer successes than the Shih, then the target is prohibited from gaining Chi from any source (including feeding and from the use of powers) for one day per point of the Shih's permanent Willpower, multiplied by the number of successes the Shih wins over the *shen*. The results may induce conditions such as fire soul or even starvation in *shen*.

Mo Kung (Bridge of the Devil Fighter)

••••• • **Ten-Ox Strength:** The Shih is capable of momentary feats of super-human strength. Spend a point of Yang Chi and a point of Willpower. The effect converts a number of dice from the Shih's Strength + Athletics pool equal to the character's permanent Willpower into automatic successes. Thus, a Shih with 8 Willpower has eight automatic successes for any Strength + Athletics roll (assuming the Shih has a pool of at least eight dice). Any remaining dice in the Strength + Athletics pool are rolled normally, with successes added to the existing automatic ones. The effects of Ten-Ox Strength last for only one roll.

••••• •• **Diamond Body:** A Shih using this gift manifests tremendous capacity to shrug off damage. Spend three points of Yang Chi and a point of Willpower to convert all Stamina dice for a soak roll into automatic successes. The Shih can perform this feat only once per soak roll, but doing so does not require an action or any effort; it's a reflexive action. The Shih must be aware of an incoming attack to use this defense against it.

Yu An (The Bridge of Jade Harmony)

••••• • **Sight Without Eyes:** Using this technique, a Shih can see and detect without the use of physical senses, perceiving with spirit alone. Spend two points of Chi (Yin or Yang). The character ignores any and all conditions that limit senses, including but not limited to darkness, noise, fog, bright light, masking scents and

impairment or injury (such as temporary or permanent blindness or deafness). The Shih automatically discerns between real things and illusions or sensory tricks, and automatically perceives invisible or otherwise supernaturally hidden things. Use of Sight Without Eyes lasts for one scene.

••••• • **The Eye of Heaven:** A Shih with this level of mastery can see with the Eye of Heaven, perceiving any place. The Shih must enter a state of quiet meditation. Spend two points of Yin Chi and make a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 8). Each success allows the Shih to perceive the desired place, object or being for one minute as if physically present. The Shih also knows exactly where the subject is, if she did not already. The Shih can follow along with the target if it travels. Otherwise, shifting perceptions to another target requires another roll and Chi expenditure.

Feng (The Bridge of the Phoenix)

••••• • **The Lizard's Tail:** The Shih can actually regenerate missing limbs or organs; basically any damage that does not result in death. Roll Willpower (difficulty 8), with each success restoring one health level of damage (bashing, lethal and/or aggravated) and regenerating damaged flesh and bone. Two separate successes are needed to restore a limb or organ. The healing process demands three Yang Chi. The power works against all forms of physical damage. It does not restore damage inflicted directly against the character's Chi.

••••• • **Ashes of the Phoenix:** Shih with true mastery of the Bridge of the Phoenix can return from death. If the Shih is slain, his body bursts into flames as Chi energy explodes outward. The corpse is consumed, but the Shih arises from the flames in a new body, completely restored to health. It takes a week for the Shih to reform. The effect costs a point of permanent Willpower and all of the Shih's remaining Chi. The character reforms with Chi pools of zero and must recover points normally (or may have a starting pool of 10 each depending on the intensity of gifts bestowed by the Heavens at that point in your chronicle). The Shih's new body is identical to the original, but in perfect health and younger by 10 to 20 years.

Shi (Bridge of the Serpent)

••••• • **Hundred Warriors Strike:** Filled with furious Chi, the Shih becomes a whirlwind of devastation. Each time she makes a successful attack on an opponent, you may spend a point of Yang Chi to make an attack against *another* opponent within the Shih's normal movement distance. This additional attack is made at the Shih's full dice pool, but it must be an unarmed attack (although the use of other Shi techniques is permitted), and the Shih cannot attack the same opponent twice in a row. This assault continues until the Shih either misses an attack or you choose to stop spending Yang Chi, which ends the use of the technique for that turn.

••••• • **Heaven Thunder Strike:** The Shih can concentrate Chi into a blow that can sunder steel or shake the ground with the force of an earthquake. Spend two Yin Chi. The character's next unarmed strike inflicts

aggravated damage and ignores any armor that's not empowered by Chi. Or the Shih's next strike inflicts 10 times its normal damage against any inanimate object. The character can essentially split wood, stone, cinderblock or even steel beams with a single blow.

Chien (Bridge of the Mirror)

••••• • **Righteous Hungry Spirit:** The Shih's soul is so empowered that any attempt to drain or steal his Chi not only fails automatically, but the hunter may steal Chi away from the attacker. Roll Willpower (difficulty equal to the attacker's Willpower), with each success taking a point of Chi from the attacker's highest Chi pool and adding it to the Shih's own. This effect occurs automatically as a reflexive action; mere possession of the power means it's active at all times.

••••• • **Demon Eating Technique:** The Shih's close-combat attacks (armed and unarmed) against *shen* not only inflict harm but dissipate the target's Chi. Spend two Yin Chi. The next successful attack causes normal damage, plus the target loses a point of Chi for each health level of damage inflicted. These points come from the target's highest Chi pool first. A target with no Chi left is destroyed, even if it has health levels remaining.

Long Ling (Bridge of the Dragon Ruler)

••••• • **Mantle of Heaven:** Cloaked in the divine protection of Heaven, a demon hunter becomes a terrible foe in the eyes of *shen*. Spend two points of Yin Chi and roll Willpower (difficulty 7). Any *shen* must exceed the Shih's successes on a similar Willpower roll in order to attack or oppose the character. One resisted Willpower roll is made for each onlooker per scene.

••••• • **Divine Mandate:** Speaking with the voice of Heaven, the Shih can command any *shen* and expect obedience. This power works like **Voice of the Yama Kings** (Long Ling •••••), except it affects any *shen* (not just spirits).

Meng (Bridge of Dreams)

••••• • **Mountain Meditation:** Shih using this master discipline achieve a degree of tranquility that makes them as unshakable as the roots of a mountain. Spend a point of Yin and Yang Chi. The character is completely immune to all forms of mental and social manipulation, natural and supernatural, for the remainder of the scene. Furthermore, he is unaffected by penalties caused by distractions of any kind (including wound penalties).

••••• • **Walking in Balance:** The Shih is so perfectly balanced between Yin and Yang that she overcomes any outside attempt to disrupt her internal Chi balance. Any attack or effect that would alter or disrupt the Shih's internal Chi balance automatically fails if a point of temporary Willpower is spent and a successful Wits + Meditation roll (difficulty 7) is made. This discipline requires no action on the part of the Shih (it's reflexive) and is in effect as long as the demon hunter has Willpower points to spend.

Zhu Mao (Bridge of the Resilient Cat)

••••• • **Arrow-Cutting:** The Shih's reflexes are superhumanly fast, capable of deflecting any ranged

attack, even a hail of bullets. The character can parry (using Wits + Melee) or dodge (using Wits + Athletics) each ranged attack that turn with his full, normal dice pool, regardless of the number of attacks. Spend three points of Yang Chi for each turn in which this power is used.

••••• **Wind-Racing Prana:** Using this power, a Shih can apply a momentary burst of superhuman speed. Spend two points of Yang Chi and multiply the character's normal movement speed by 20 for a single turn. Alternately, the Shih can cover great distances at a tireless running pace. The Shih can run at full, normal speed for up to a day without tiring, still at the cost of two Yang Chi.

THE GOD SLAYER

Background: The God Slayer is a figure out of Shih legend, a force of celestial power who has aided humanity in its greatest battles against *shen* and Kuei-jin. The last time the God Slayer intervened was 400 ago, in a battle between the demon Mu Tong Pok and a million demon soldiers against four Shih who led an army of ten thousand mortals. The Slayer has never spoken or said anything about himself, or where he comes from. The Shih only know that he is the greatest warrior appointed by Heaven and that he has returned to lead them in the final battle of the Fifth Age.

Image: The God Slayer is a massive figure, standing over seven feet tall and powerfully muscled. His hair is short and black and his features are Asian. He has a third eye in the center of his forehead. He dresses in a loose-fitting pair of pants belted at the waist, and sandals. He carries a massive silver-bladed sword that he wields with devastating effectiveness.

Roleplaying Hints: You never speak. Actions are your words. You exist for only one purpose: to protect humanity against the scourge of the *shen* that have abandoned their duties under Heaven. You are the Celestial Emperor's vengeance, His chosen instrument,



and you will lead your troops to victory over the forces of Hell, no matter the cost.

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Bravo

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6, Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 6, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 5, Athletics 5, Dodge 4, Intimidation 6, Leadership 6, Martial Arts 5, Melee 6, Occult 5, Survival 5

Qiao: The God Slayer has seven dots in all Shih Qiao. For Storytellers using the Mo Chi Kung Fu maneuvers from **Demon Hunter X**, the God Slayer can use any of them.

Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 5, Courage 5

Humanity: 9

Willpower: 10

Yin Chi: 50

Yang Chi: 50

WICKED CITY

For Ages, the Yama Kings have struggled for dominion over souls, for greater power both in Yomi and in the Middle Kingdom. In particular, they've sought the souls of the Kuei-jin, souls that were once theirs, but which escaped to return to the world of the living. All of those struggles have been toward one end: the coming of the Sixth Age and the time when one of the Yama Kings will ascend to the throne of the Demon Emperor. That time has come and the Lords of Yomi are ready to make their move.

INTRODUCTION

Mikaboshi, Lord of the Wicked City, is something of a non-traditional Yama King. He is fascinated with the trappings and doings of the modern world, rather than some hell described in ancient sutras. Mikaboshi is a cutting-edge demon, invested in what he sees as a growth market — one that is about to pay off handsomely.

Cities and the blight they breed are Mikaboshi's stock in trade. For centuries, he has wormed tendrils of his Wicked City into metropolises across the world. Not just in the Middle Kingdom, but in any city the Kuei-jin have penetrated. His latest conquests are the North American cities occupied by the Ocean-Crossing Crusaders of the Great Leap Outward. The seeds of Mikaboshi's power germinate throughout all of his cities, in the darkest places of urban decay, and now the time is right for them to sprout.

One of the seeds that the Lord of the Wicked City has planted is in the heart of Strike Force Zero, the secret organization of Japanese demon hunters. The Zaibatsu considers SF0 to be agents for hunting down and eliminating "reality deviants." the Zaibatsu is unaware, however, that the force ultimately serves Mikaboshi by eliminating potential threats and the pawns of his rivals, ensuring that the Yama King will rise to power.

BROKEN MIRRORS

The first signs of Mikaboshi's rise appear where Chi has become so fouled by urban blight that the Wall is tattered, as thin as rice paper, allowing light and shadows from Yomi to spill into the material world. These "broken mirrors" are extensions of Mikaboshi's Hell on Earth, places where the Wicked City touches the real world and where it is possible to step between the two, sometimes without even knowing it.

A *wu* can discover a broken mirror in whatever city it calls home. Perhaps members are asked to investigate strange portents and sightings, or they do so on their own initiative. They discover that the Yomi World presses into the Middle Kingdom like a cancer, and that it's growing. In fact, after they're discovered, the broken mirrors grow and multiply. Not only do they appear in cities around the world, but some cities are afflicted with more than one, and the jaws of Yomi yawn wide.

Accusations and counter-accusations fly among the Kuei-jin. Not only are the broken mirrors extensive, but there doesn't seem to be much that the Wan Kuei can do about them. Rituals to cleanse and balance the Chi in an area are temporarily effective against newly formed sores in the skin of reality, but hell-gates simply erupt elsewhere a short while later and Kuei-jin sorcerers can't keep pace.

The signs are clear. The Sixth Age has come and the Kuei-jin must prepare for war.

PREPARE FOR WAR

Although most Kuei-jin — at least followers of the Fivefold Way of Xue — agree that it is their duty to oppose the Yama Kings and their *akuma* servants, the courts of the Wan Kuei are far from united. Not even the impending invasion of Hell can force them to set aside their differences, although characters' efforts might.

Ancestors and arhats call war councils and meetings across the Middle Kingdom. Different courts prepare to repel the forces of Yomi, whatever the cost. After all, the Kuei-jin have experienced the domain and power of the Yama Kings firsthand. They know that Final Death is preferable to existence in a Yomi realm on Earth. Indeed, some Kuei-jin faced with the Sixth Age might choose Final Death rather than battle the armies of the Yama Kings, leading them to face the Eye of Heaven or otherwise abandon their hold on unlife.

The *wu* can take part in various war councils. If the characters are in positions of influence, they might be entrusted with planning the defense of their area or domain. If not, perhaps the characters' superiors fall victim to attack by *akuma* or to one of the first assaults by Strike Force Zero (see below), leaving the characters in charge.

Characters can also assume a diplomatic role, going among the different courts to rally support for a unified defense against the Yomi Wan — or for a pre-emptive strike, taking the fight to the Yama Kings.

THE MOUTH OF HELL

A broken mirror has particular effects on the material world and its Chi. These phenomena are explained in detail in *Killing Streets*, but are summarized here.

There are no physical signs of a broken mirror, but some Kuei-jin can sense the foulness that surrounds and pervades them. A Perception + Awareness roll can be made for a Kuei-jin or other *shen* (difficulty equal to the local Wall rating) to sense the corruption of a broken mirror.

There is only Demon Chi within the domain of a broken mirror, even if one feeds on the mortal inhabitants of the area. Kuei-jin cannot acquire Yin or Yang Chi there, and the difficulties of all shadow soul rolls increase by two. *Akuma* within a broken mirror regain Demon Chi at will if they are capable of breath drinking or osmosis. The difficulties of their Discipline rolls are also reduced by one; two if they serve the Yama King who controls the region in question (that's typically Mikaboshi by the dawn of the Sixth Age). All this means *akuma* are extremely dangerous within the bounds of a broken mirror.

Bakemono are likewise empowered by a broken mirror. They can easily possess corrupted mortals in the area, and are not banished back to Yomi when a mortal vessel is destroyed (since the broken mirror is in essence a part of the Yomi World). A demon spirit simply possesses another host body, instead.

Kuei-jin find many of their powers weakened within a broken mirror. Disciplines and rites involving the spirit worlds always connect to the Yomi World, instead. The difficulties of Disciplines that rely on balance or manipulating Yin or Yang Chi increase by two, while those of Demon Arts decrease by one. (Also, don't forget that shadow soul rolls are harder for Kuei-jin, as discussed above.)

Mortals living within the bounds of a broken mirror become corrupt and wicked. Morality melts and runs under the heat of anger, hatred and unbridled lust. Debauchery and violence are common, leading to increasingly wicked and heinous acts. Such mortals are easily possessed by demon spirits or influenced by *akuma*, and offer nothing but corrupt Demon Chi to Kuei-jin who attempt to feed on them.

They can act as representatives of a particular court or ancestor, or they can go it on their own, trying to put together an alliance among the paranoid and treacherous undead.

How successful the characters are depends on their efforts, but even the most exacting plans go awry, and the Kuei-jin must deal with Mikaboshi's own pre-emptive efforts with the Yama King's secret weapon.

ZERO HOUR

The secret organization known as Strike Force Zero has been hunting monsters for years, using high-tech weapons and equipment beyond that of even the most sophisticated government black-ops programs. What most of the agents of SF0 don't know, however, is that their equipment and mandate comes from the Zaibatsu, the Japanese branch of the Technocracy, a secret alliance that seeks to define and control the nature of reality. But not even the Zaibatsu knows that Strike Force Zero ultimately serves Mikaboshi's ends. The Lord of the Wicked City infiltrates the technology and agents of Zero with his corrupt Chi and turn the hunters into secret weapons.

As the Kuei-jin discover and investigate the broken mirrors throughout the world, they encounter Strike Force Zero agents who apparently do the same. Naturally, SF0 forces assume that the Kuei-jin are responsible for the unusual phenomena and do their best to capture and interrogate targets. Failing that, they attempt to destroy the vampires. See the "Game Information" of this scenario for the capabilities of a typical Strike Force Zero agent. These encounters become increasingly common, and SF0 gathers information about the Kuei-jin and their activities.

The more time SF0 agents spend in broken mirrors, the more the corrupt Demon Chi of Yomi and the Wicked City influences them. This taint spreads among all agents like a plague. Characters may notice that the mortals behave more callously and violently than usual. They care less for civilian casualties or the need for secrecy. They resort to torture, mutilation and massive collateral damage — whatever it takes to get the job done.

STRIKE FORCE ZERO CHARACTERS

This scenario also suits a group playing Strike Force Zero characters in a **Demon Hunter X** chronicle. Agents may become aware of the growing influence of Mikaboshi's Demon Chi throughout their organization. Peers they've known for some time come back from missions *changed* in some way. People within Strike Force Zero grow callous and cruel, and it all seems to trace back to an increase in unusual occurrences in urban areas across the world. The characters investigate personally, potentially exposing themselves to the corruption of the Demon Chi.

Ultimately, the characters discover the truth and may go rogue from Strike Force Zero, trying to figure out what to do now that their organization is compromised. Do they ally themselves with the Kuei-jin or try to go it on their own? Is there anything they can do against a creature as powerful as Mikaboshi? The agents may try to avert the Yama King's rise to the throne or they can form the nucleus of a resistance movement against Mikaboshi's rule if you run a chronicle set in the Sixth Age.

RISE OF THE WICKED CITY

Once the broken mirrors have corrupted most Zero agents, and the characters have had an opportunity to rally the forces of the Middle Kingdom, the next step in Mikaboshi's plan gets underway. The broken mirrors expand. The Wicked City invades the Middle Kingdom like a cancer, eating away at reality.

Initially, the broken mirrors are confined to urban areas incorporated into Mikaboshi's Wicked City. Soon, all major cities are part of the Yama King's domain. *Shen* inhabiting them have no choice but to flee or swear allegiance to the demon lord. Any that remain are hunted down by Demons of Iron and Violence (see p. 169) or by Strike Force agents who become increasingly commonplace in cities. The same applies to western cities and their "*shen*," whose own squabbles are brought to a halt by the sudden invasion. Many Kin-jin succumb to the corruption of Yomi, giving themselves over to Mikaboshi for the opportunity to feed within his growing domain.

Mikaboshi's agents hunt Kuei-jin in cities from Hong Kong to San Francisco. *Akuma* emerge from the shadows to take their place at the head of hunting parties. Although the August Courts attempt to hold back the tide, they are forced to retreat from urban strongholds at the cost of many Kuei-jin destroyed by Mikaboshi's mechanized legions. The same is true for courts across the Middle Kingdom. The savage Kuei-jin of the Golden Courts fare slightly better than the rest, able to flee into the jungles, but the hunters become the hunted even there.

Characters might attempt to defend one or more of the courts against the invasion of demons, bakemono and *akuma*, fighting a losing battle before they are forced to flee or make a final stand. Meeting Final Death in the defense of Kuei-jin history and tradition is a fitting end for some, while others may help engineer an evacuation of strongholds, allowing surviving Kuei-jin to escape for now.

DEFENDING DRAGON NESTS

Once broken mirrors extend over all the cities of the world, their identity changes significantly. Every city becomes an extension of the Wicked City, a beachhead of the Yomi World. Buildings grow taller, more jagged, and loom overhead. They're dark towers that block out the sun and leave the streets in perpetual shadow. Architecture twists and becomes more Gothic, while also taking on a futuristic Asian flavor. The negative aspects of cities become more pronounced. Corruption, violence and malice run rampant. Homelessness, substance abuse, cruelty and vice are pervasive. Clouds gather day and night over towers of glass and steel, spitting acid rain on the masses below.

Citizens are transformed, as well. Some become raw materials for factories and chop shops that turn out legions of Mikaboshi's Demons of Iron and Violence. The rest think only of themselves and look the other way as Mikaboshi works his will on the world. Order in cities is brutally maintained, while law and order in the countryside

gives way to fear and panic. (More on the nature of the Wicked City and the fate of those who reside there can be found in *The Thousand Hells*, p. 36.)

Then the cities grow.

It's slow at first, but gets faster and faster as urban centers expand outward hundreds of feet each day. They send out tendrils of wire, asphalt and steel like roots digging deep into the Earth. They flow along roads and rivers, stretching out in all directions, spreading like bloodstains in the fabric of the world. Nothing seems able to halt their "progress." Indeed, anyone who tries must deal with legions of the Yama King's demon-soldiers.

The Wicked City infiltrates and assimilates places with the lowest ambient Chi first. It then gradually works its way into dragon lines and nests to consume the Chi there, feeding the great machine of Mikaboshi's empire. Thus, dragon nests are the last havens for the Kuei-jin and any others who oppose Mikaboshi's victory. The characters may attempt to organize the defense of nests, hoping to save such important locales. Nests also serve as the last sources of Yin and Yang Chi for the Kuei-jin, allowing them to feed for a time without being corrupted by the Demon Chi of Yomi.

CONCLUSION

"Wicked City" can end in several different ways, depending on how you want to wrap up your chronicle. Remember, even if the situation is utterly hopeless, the story is about the characters. Their actions and various ends should matter somehow. Such things certainly matter to the players, even if they don't change the overall course of events.

- The characters (Kuei-jin, SF0, Shih or what have you) stage a last stand at a powerful dragon nest as the forces of Mikaboshi surround and overwhelm them. Perhaps the characters even manage to reach the slopes of Mount Meru in the spirit world, protecting the center of the world against the final assault. Although the characters are ultimately doomed, this ending allows them the opportunity to die valiantly, fighting for a cause, struggling against the coming of the Sixth Age until the very end.

- The *wu* gets an opportunity to strike back. The characters discover that Mikaboshi plans a coronation ceremony in which he will declare his victory over the other Yama Kings. Rumor also has it that the Lord of the Wicked City will take his closest rival Tou Mu as his



Demon Empress, consolidating his power and hold over the world. The characters have an opportunity to slip into Mikaboshi's skyscraper-citadel and assassinate the Yama King with a powerful jade weapon, kept secret among the Kuei-jin since time immemorial.

The characters may succeed in destroying Mikaboshi only to have Tou Mu assume the throne, revealing that she used everyone to arrive at this destination. Or they might destroy both powerful Yama Kings, but only succeed in turning the world into a battlefield between the remainder.

- For a truly explosive ending, the characters get their hands on a tactical nuclear weapon, "liberated" by the Devil Tigers from an Asian regime that never got the chance to use it. If they can get into Mikaboshi's citadel during his coronation, they can wipe out the Yama Kings in a single strike. Ideally, the characters should get to confront their enemies personally before the end. Perhaps the *wu* brings a sudden end to the Sixth Age in a blast of cleansing atomic fire, wiping out the Yama Kings and clearing the way for a new primordial Age to begin.

- The characters find a way to escape Mikaboshi's iron demons and create an underground resistance to his rule (perhaps based on the undercity scavengers of *The Thousand Hells*, p. 96). This option is best suited to wrap up an existing chronicle and to start a new one, as discussed below.

FURTHER STORIES

In addition to being the end of a *Kindred of the East* game, "Wicked City" can serve as the basis for an entirely new chronicle, one set in a Sixth Age under the rule of Mikaboshi and his bride. The Wicked City covers the world, paving over oceans and blocking out the sky with a massive dome. Black, skeletal buildings reach up to heavens the color of blood. All creatures are subject to Mikaboshi's will, cogs in a vast machine, ruled by demon lieutenants.

The characters can be Kuei-jin survivors of Mikaboshi's purge, rogue agents of Strike Force Zero, Shih demon hunters, dhampyrs or any combination of the above. Perhaps the characters are mortals born and raised in this hellish world, recruited by surviving demon hunters and trained as part of a resistance against the emperor's rule. There is a prophecy foretold in ancient sutras that the righteous will rise up against the Demon Emperor one day. The Wicked City will be swept away, bringing about a new Age of peace, beauty and serenity. Perhaps the characters are those righteous.

GAME INFORMATION

Material in the *Demon Hunter X* and *The Thousand Hells* sourcebooks is useful to expand upon the characters and options posed here, but are not necessary to run this story.

DEMONS OF IRON AND VIOLENCE

These creatures are tall, cybernetically enhanced warriors. Many were once agents of Strike Force Zero, overtaken by their demon-tainted implants to become soulless soldiers of the Demon Emperor. The typical iron demon is three meters tall, covered in armor plating and

woven with thick cables. Its eyes glow with a dull red light and the creature is clad in a translucent rain slicker and goggles to protect it from the acid rain and smog of the Wicked City.

Note that in broken mirrors, Mikaboshi's demons regain Chi at will, giving them almost inexhaustible resources.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 5, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Computer 1, Dodge 2, Firearms 4, Intimidation 4, Investigation 1, Leadership 1, Linguistics (Cantonese, English, Han, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Thai) 3, Medicine 1, Melee 3, Occult 1, Politics 1, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Survival 2

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Black Wind 3, Chi'h Muh 2, Fortitude 4, Potence 4, Protean 2, Yin Prana 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Contacts 3, Mentor 1

Hun 0, P'o 7, Yin 3, Yang 6, Willpower 5

Health Levels: -0 (x7)/ -1 (x2)/ -2 (x2)/ -5/ Incapacitated

Possessions: Heavy helical-clip assault rifle (Damage 10, Range 250, Rate 3, Clip 100), protective gear (+2 dice soak). Some demons have special weapons such as grenade launchers, flamethrowers and heavy chainsaws on missions.

HELL ON EARTH

The coming of the Sixth Age in "Wicked City" means the Yomi World and Middle Kingdom become synonymous, with the Demon Emperor holding sway. That means fundamental changes in the nature of Chi and the powers of the Kuei-jin (and other *shen*). Once the Wicked City extends over the world, make the following modifications to *Kindred of the East* systems.

Virtues: The Kuei-jin balance between Hun and P'o is upset. The extent of the Yomi World's power calls out to the P'o and strengthens the inner demon. Make rolls to resist shadow soul as normal, but if the P'o takes over, control does not automatically revert to the Kuei-jin's Hun nature after a scene. Make a Hun roll (difficulty 8) at the end of the scene, instead, to see if the character can regain control. If the roll fails, P'o nature prevails for another scene, at the end of which the player can roll again. Each day that P'o nature remains in control increases the difficulty of the Hun roll by one. If difficulty ever exceeds 9, an additional success is required on rolls for each further day. If the number of successes required ever exceeds a character's Hun Virtue, his P'o assumes control permanently.

Chi: Acquiring Chi is challenging in the Wicked City. Or more specifically, acquiring anything other than corrupt Demon Chi is challenging. Chi acquired from drinking the blood or eating the flesh of mortals is always Demon Chi, corrupted by the *feng shui* of Yomi. Kuei-jin able to feed by breath or osmosis can attempt to acquire relatively "pure" Chi energy. The difficulty of feeding in this way is increased by one. A botch means the Kuei-jin acquires a point of Demon Chi, in addition to any other effects.

Demon Chi: Demon Chi is easy to acquire in the Sixth Age of the Demon Emperor. Kuei-jin Demon Chi pools are no longer limited by P'o rating, but can rise to 10. When a character acquires 10 Demon Chi, the player must make a roll to resist shadow soul. The Kuei-jin also acquires a permanent dot of P'o upon gaining a pool of 10 Demon Chi, whether shadow soul is resisted or not.

Meditation: Meditation and achieving inner harmony are more difficult in the hellish world of Mikaboshi's city, limiting capabilities that require peace, quiet and undisturbed contemplation. The difficulty for such focus is increased by two unless a character has Meditation 4 or more. The difficulty is increased by one at Meditation 4, and goes unchanged for characters with 5. The mastery achieved at a rating of 5 is sufficient to block out the distractions of even Yomi.

Demon Arts: The Demon Arts are generally easy to use in the Wicked City, but also more dangerous because of the threat of shadow soul rolls. Black Wind and Demon Shintai require only two points of Demon Chi to activate, and they last for an entire scene. The player must make a roll to resist shadow soul for every three turns that either power is used.

STORYTELLING IN THE SIXTH AGE

This section provides advice and information useful to Storytellers preparing an end for a **Kindred of the East** chronicle. It offers advice on how to wrap up a game (regardless of what end scenario you choose), and things to consider for your final sessions. It also includes ideas on modifying existing rules to suit particular types of finales (and possibly follow-up chronicles set in the Sixth Age).

ENDING A CHRONICLE

"All good things must end," they say. Although it's possible that a **Kindred of the East** game might run for years, even the best ones grow stale and tired over time. You've told what stories you can with the characters. The protagonists have changed and developed, perhaps becoming quite powerful and influential. The players have grown familiar with the elements of the setting and chronicle, and have had a vital hand in shaping them. But sooner or later, it comes time to bring your story to a close and move on to other new and exciting possibilities.

WHY END IT?

Why should you end your chronicle? There are several reasons. The first and foremost is that the chronicle may not be fun or exciting anymore. Other reasons include providing a satisfying ending to the overall story, or providing a clear break between an old chronicle and an entirely new one.

The first reason is the simplest. If your chronicle doesn't provide your troupe with the enjoyment it once did, it's probably time to wrap things up. Chronicles sometimes flicker out slowly rather than

end cleanly, particularly if the Storyteller's interest wanes. Rather than let your game sputter out, you can have fun with a spectacular closure. Ending a chronicle can actually invigorate your creativity, since it opens up so many new possibilities. In doing so, you may discover the seeds of a newer, fresher and more exciting story to tell.

Although it's theoretically possible for chronicles to go on indefinitely, it's often wise to consider an end. Good stories involve a beginning, middle and end. A resolution ties up everything that's occurred previously, just like the end of a good book or film. Thus, it's rewarding to have your chronicle go out on a high note, when things are going well, rather than allow it to run out of steam and die a slow death. If your end leaves players wanting more, you can always start a new chronicle as a sequel to the old — with the same characters or different ones — and take things in a new direction, knowing that the previous chapter is closed.

THEME

The end of a chronicle should have two foci. First, the end should uphold the overall theme of the chronicle and emphasize it in some way. Second, the theme of an end is just that — a conclusion, whatever that may mean for your troupe and characters.

CONTINUING ON

Kindred of the East comes to a close with this book. No more supplements will be published for the line. It's quite possible that you'd rather not end your game, though. Or maybe you want to run one in the future and you don't want to change the World of Darkness significantly. Just because this chapter is intended to help you wrap up the game doesn't mean you can't continue on or go back to it. Your chronicle is your own. If anything, this book makes that official, since what happens from here is up to you.

Even if you do decide to end your chronicle with the arrival of the Sixth Age, that doesn't mean you can't run a "traditional" **Kindred of the East** chronicle later on. You can decide that the new chronicle has nothing to do with the old, that it's set in a different but similar world, or that it's set before the arrival of the Sixth Age and describes "untold events" from your previous game. You can even say that your new chronicle is set in a future (or past) cycle of the Wheel of Ages. The same themes play out, but are slightly different from cycle to cycle.

If you enjoy the anime style of **Kindred of the East**, much of the same feel is captured (albeit a bit more primordially) in **Exalted**. Events of that game can even be assumed to take place in the world's Second Age, which you can place either before or after the contents of this chapter.

Consider the presiding theme(s) of your chronicle. What has the series been about and how can you draw attention to that purpose at the end? For example, if the chronicle has been about the struggle of young Kuei-jin to effect change in the tradition-bound and corrupt August Courts, does the end of the chronicle prove that such efforts are futile, or that time and effort make them successful? Perhaps the characters finally get what they wanted all along, but are faced with the challenge of what to do with it afterward.

Resolving the chronicle's theme also offers opportunities to tie up loose ends. If the focus of the game is forgiveness, maybe some of the characters find what they're looking for while others do not. Or they all discover that forgiveness must be given freely rather than earned. Consider different ways to use the chronicle's theme or themes to fit its end.

The end of a chronicle is also, naturally, about closure. The following are some themes you may want to develop at the end of your game.

- **Dedication:** The end of a story is often not so much about how things wrap up, but about how the characters react and what they choose to do. The coming of the Sixth Age is something too vast for any individual to prevent or change. Characters can only hope to survive and change with it, remaining true to themselves and their chosen paths. The end of a chronicle offers characters a chance shine one last time before it's all over. It can be the culmination of all their efforts, brought down to a single moment. Does a vengeful character take the opportunity to seek justice, even if it means her own destruction? Does a character continue seeking enlightenment as the world goes to hell? How devoted are the characters to their beliefs, principals and goals, even if those objectives ultimately prove to have no meaning?

- **Change:** The turning of an Age is a time of sweeping transition. Whatever the Sixth Age is like, it's certain that the world of the Kuei-jin will never be the same again. Change is the antithesis of the hidebound and unliving Demon People. Change is difficult and frightening for them, but it is also inevitable. Kuei-jin have demonstrated that they can change with considerable effort and dedication. Whether the characters have what it takes to adapt with the turning of the Wheel of Ages can be an underlying theme of your chronicle's end.

- **Death:** Perhaps the greatest change that characters face is the prospect of death. The Kuei-jin have endured death and hell to return to the living world. But when faced with the prospect of Final Death, even they may turn away, unable to confront the inevitable. It may not even be a question of whether the characters die at the end, but simply *how* they die. Giving the characters the opportunity to choose the time and manner of their death is a powerful narrative element. Perhaps one character prefers to die in battle, taking as many enemies with him as he can. Another faces the Eye of Heaven in a solemn ceremony. In eastern stories, death — or at least the acceptance of mortality — is a key to enlightenment. Perhaps at the very end, at the moment

of death, characters find what they have been looking for all along.

- **Hope:** The end of the Age of Darkness and the beginning of the Age of Sorrow — the entire Kuei-jin quest for enlightenment — deals with hope in the face of doom. Do characters surrender to despair or forge ahead, secure in their beliefs in the Cycle of Ages and the Wheel of Karma?

DEALING WITH INEVITABILITY

One particular theme that's common to chronicle ends is inevitability, which can pose a challenge for players and Storytellers alike. If a game is going to end anyway, how does any of it really matter? If the characters are faced with an overwhelming and unavoidable fate, why should they continue to struggle? Why not just give up and accept their destiny?

Characters can do that, but what does it mean for them and the rest of the world? Rather than treat the finale of the chronicle as a burden, turn it into an opportunity. Some of the best stories — particularly in eastern literature and cinema — are about heroes facing an ordained end. It's not whether they can avoid it that matters. It's about how they each choose to face it.

An important part of ending a chronicle is giving players an opportunity to decide when and how their characters expire. A fitting and dramatic death scene or other departure from the story can be the crowning finale for a well played and interesting character. Consult with your players about appropriate ways to end their individual stories, and allow those people to have their moments.

Mood

The mood of a chronicle's end is just as important as its theme. It sets the tone for the conclusion and affects how the players and characters react. An evocative mood is useful for showing characters that the end approaches, and to allow them to react. The following are some common moods to evoke the Sixth Age.

- **Fear:** Fear is the strongest element of the end. It may be fear of death or fear of eternal torture in Yomi. Fear of the loss of pride, prestige or honor. Fear of failure before the August Personage of Jade. Or even fear of the unknown. Many Kuei-jin *think* they know what the Sixth Age will bring, but no one can say for sure. Not even the wisest arhats know when the Wheel of Ages will turn. Some bodhisattvas claim to know, and may even be right, but who heeds their advice in time for it to make a difference? As signs of the Sixth Age rise, so does Kuei-jin fear, and acting out of fear may make the Demon People careless or irrational.

- **Despair:** The Sixth Age is known as the Age of Sorrow for good reason. Despair is a common mood as the sense of impending doom looms larger and larger, and hope seems all but lost. Kuei-jin lose faith in their Dharmas. Jina and Running Monkeys lose faith in their elders. Kuei-

jin turn from the Fivefold Path to the Heretical Dharmas or sell themselves to the Yama Kings in hopes of joining the winning side. The corrupt and inefficient bureaucracies of the August Courts are examples of the creeping effects of despair. There doesn't seem to be any point in trying, in fighting the inevitable, but there are still those willing to fight to the bitter end if need be.

- **Chaos:** The Kuei-jin are creatures of order and tradition. In the Sixth Age, such foundations crack. Traditions are overlooked or abandoned and the young turn to a hundred new ways, their energy spent in all directions without focus. The structures of Kuei-jin society break down. Factions clash openly and harmony eludes followers of the Fivefold Way. The ultimate expression of the chaos may be war, perhaps sparked by a particular Dharma or faction, or by the Yama Kings themselves.

- **Transcendence:** While most of the moods of the end are ominous and terrifying, there can be an element of promise in it all, too. There can be a mood of transcendence at the end, in which the characters rise above the chaos through acts of heroism or enlightenment to find peace at the eye of the storm. It may only be a moment before the characters face their demise, but it can be a defining moment, the climax of your game.

PACING

The timing of your end can be intimidating. You have a definite finale that you want to achieve, but you don't want to reach it too quickly or the story will feel rushed or incomplete. But if you take too long it feels like you haven't really decided to end the chronicle at all, since it just keeps going!

Once you decide that you're ending your chronicle, when do you do it? Games tend to build up a considerable amount of momentum, just like any story with a complex cast of characters. Doing the chronicle justice usually demands time to tie up loose ends and subplots and to prepare players for a resolution, providing a fitting conclusion to events.

Take stock of your chronicle for aspects of it that you need to address and wrap it all up. Whether this occurs in the midst of an ongoing chronicle or before a limited series about the end begins, it's easier to reach your destination if you have some sort of map. Maybe characters need to be confronted by a foe they once thought dead, and now he's back in the service of the Yama Kings. Or one of the characters needs to secretly fall to his own dark side and lead his *wu* mates down the same damned path. Once you know what needs to be taken care of, you can figure out how many chapters or individual stories need to be told to bring things to a close.

An end is a climax to your chronicle, so you generally want to speed up the pace of events as you approach the last. Start out small and gradually increase the flow as events occur. The idea is to create momentum in the story as it builds toward a conclusion. The closer you get to the end, the more eager the players should feel about what comes next, just like getting close to the end of a good book.

SHOULD THE PLAYERS KNOW?

Should you tell your players that you're ending the chronicle or not? You may be concerned that informing them might affect their actions and enjoyment of the game. If they know that it's all going to end, their characters might behave differently than if they remained ignorant. They might, but good players can separate what they know from what their characters know. A change in player behavior might also be exactly what you want for the end.

It's usually fairly hard to hide the fact that a game is coming to an end, especially if all the signs are there for the characters to see. Players are likely to struggle against the end, too, if they don't know it's inevitable. While you may want *characters* to struggle, making the players feel that their struggles are futile only frustrates them.

So it's probably best to inform your players and solicit their help in drawing the curtain. Find out what plot threads and loose ends they want to see resolved. What do their characters want to accomplish before it's too late? You can even get player input on how they want their characters written out of the story (if they do at all). Given the opportunity, many players are quite enthusiastic about the opportunity to shape the destruction of their world.

TYING UP LOOSE ENDS

A satisfying end should provide closure for players and characters. That means tying up loose plot threads. The players aren't left wondering what might have happened, or what that subplot was *really* all about. It helps to wind down the game and close things neatly.

The trick is to not wrap things up *too* neatly, though. You don't want to tie up all loose ends in a single story or epilogue. It can come off as rushed and artificial. If you have the luxury of resolving your chronicle in its own good time, address the various hanging plot points one by one until they're all done. Take care along the way not to introduce any major new threads that won't be finished by the time the chronicle is done. That way, things draw to a close naturally as the characters settle their various personal interests and the overall plot of the chronicle plays out.

EPILOGUE

You may wish to include an epilogue at the end of your chronicle. It comes after the climax and provides a sort of "cool down" from the preceding excitement. An epilogue serves to answer any remaining questions about character or supporting cast members' fate. Maybe that one enemy lackey who got away is pounced upon by demon hordes just when he thinks he's safe. Or a lost ally looks back down upon the characters from the slopes of Mount Meru.

Generally, an epilogue should be relatively brief. The story is over. All that's left is to explain a last few things.

You may even wish to simply describe the epilogue to the players, although it's best if their characters are directly involved and they can participate in it.

SYSTEMS

Ending an ongoing chronicle offers a great opportunity to tinker with the game's systems and character capabilities. The Sixth Age may impose dramatic changes on the nature of the Kuei-jin and their powers, on the relationship between the material and spirit worlds, and on the flow and flavor of Chi. Some rules that wouldn't normally be suitable for an ongoing game can herald the end. If a particular change doesn't work, it's fairly easy to revise it, saying that the whims of karma are fickle in the Age of Sorrow.

Here are just a few ways to change game rules to suit your vision of the last days. Some of these rules can apply to the scenarios described earlier, while others are just suggestions, jumping-off points for your own version of the Sixth Age.

Chi

Chi is one of the primary elements of *Kindred of the East*. It's the power that sustains the Hungry Dead and other *shen*. Wars are fought over control of dragon nests and the dragon lines that connect them. Mortals are valuable to the Kuei-jin for the Chi they bear, making people prey. Chi is also tied to the changing of the Ages. The passing of the Age of Legends came when the August Personage of Jade cursed the Wan Xian, denying them the capacity to breathe in Chi from the very air, forcing them to steal it from others to survive and transforming them into the Wan Kuei. The modern changing of Ages may have a similar effect the nature of Chi and the Kuei-jin ability to gather it.

- **Chi Imbalance:** The type of Chi available to the Kuei-jin changes, favoring either Yin or Yang. For example, as the Sixth Age dawns, Yang Chi becomes rare while Yin Chi, the energy of darkness and stillness, predominates. It's hard for the Kuei-jin to maintain Chi balance. Temporary imbalance becomes common, which means they risk damage whenever they expend Chi (*Kindred of the East*, p. 140). The rare type of Chi becomes precious, and Kuei-jin are likely to struggle to secure supplies of it. Consider a shortage of Yang Chi in the Sixth Age, with surviving *hengeyokai* or *hsien* safeguarding the few remaining pockets. In a Sixth Age with a shortage of Yin Chi, wild Kuei-jin may hunt ghosts and stalk the dead for the power to douse the fires that burn within them.

A lack of a particular type of Chi also makes the Kuei-jin predisposed toward permanent Chi imbalance. If Yin Chi is plentiful but Yang is rare, the Kuei-jin likely become *ch'ing shih*: decayed, walking corpses. A Sixth Age glutted with Yang Chi begets wild and passionate Kuei-jin who are ruled by their emotions and capable of spawning *dhampyrs* (perhaps enough of them that the remaining human population begins to shrink). Such imbalance creates a unique atmosphere for a chronicle set in the Sixth Age.

- **Demon Chi:** The Age of Sorrow marks the rise of the Yama Kings and the Demon Emperor, and might herald their dominion over the Middle Kingdom. As the power of Yomi grows, the world's Chi becomes increasingly tainted or defiled — it becomes Demon Chi. This is the power of the P'o soul (*Kindred of the East*, p. 91). Only a slight amount of Yin- and Yang-aspected Chi may remain, or none at all.

The pervasiveness of such tainted energy has a corrupting effect on Kuei-jin. If Demon Chi is the only source of power available to them, Kuei-jin can gain and store only as much as their P'o ratings allow. Hungry Dead with high P'o feed and survive more easily, while those who rely on Hun are forced to allow their demon souls greater influence or become the prey of more powerful Kuei-jin.

Demon Chi can be used to fuel Kuei-jin capabilities in the absence of Yin or Yang Chi, but it still calls for a P'o roll against a difficulty of Hun +3. Four or more successes on a roll means a Kuei-jin enters fire soul automatically. Kuei-jin in this setting walk a precarious line between the need to maintain power and the risk of becoming demonic beasts.

- **Scarce Chi:** In the Sixth Age, Chi may drain from the world like blood from a corpse, leaving the Kuei-jin to starve and fade away. As the August Personage denied the Wan Xian the power to breathe, so the Sixth Age may limit or deny the Wan Kuei the ability to feed. Instead of a particular kind of Chi becoming scarce, as described previously, *all* Chi becomes rare or at least less accessible to the Kuei-jin. The Hungry Dead must hoard their Chi and are reluctant to spend it unless absolutely necessary.

- **Restricted Feeding:** A variation on the "Scarce Chi" option is that Kuei-jin may be limited in their capacity to feed. This approach can involve variations of its own, depending on how restricted feeding becomes. Generally, you can "scale back" the means of obtaining Chi discussed in *Kindred of the East* (pp. 137-138).

If *bodhisattvas* and *arhats* lose the capacity to acquire Chi through osmosis, they must find prey once more. That makes dragon nests worthless to the Kuei-jin as a source of power, although the sites might remain as gateways between worlds (see the discussion on the Wall and spirit worlds that follows). Elder vampires hunting means strain imposed upon the Wan Kuei's chosen prey, humanity. Scarlet screens have to work overtime to conceal increased feeding — and to be sources of Chi. Competition for prey causes friction between factions, and increased hunting may attract the attention of demon hunters.

Kuei-jin reduced to obtaining Chi from human flesh are pitiful creatures, but desperate times call for desperate measures. If flesh becomes the sole source of Chi, the Kuei-jin have no choice but to adapt or starve. Sooner or later, these recourses lead to temptation by fire or shadow soul, which only indulge hideous appetites. Such a terrible fate might reduce the proud Wan Kuei to little more than a horde of ghouls. The resulting shame could cause widespread Dharmic degeneration, even among *arhats*.

and bodhisattvas. Some Kuei-jin become *chih-mei*, losing all trace of humanity. The central struggle of the chronicle is holding on to any vestige of human nature while simultaneously avoiding demon hunters and outraged human authorities.

It could also be that Kuei-jin feeding is so limited that the Hungry Dead can obtain Chi only from other *shen*, including their own kind. This fate dooms the Kuei-jin to civil war. Once the hengeyokai, *hsien* and other prey are gone — and most likely even before then — the Kuei-jin turn upon each other and upon western Kindred in an orgy of violence. Eventually, their numbers are pared down until only a handful remain, each hunting the others for enough Chi to survive for a few more hours. Then the last vampire is doomed to starve.

- **Restricted Use:** Beyond limitations on obtaining Chi, Kuei-jin may face restrictions on the ability to channel and use what Chi they have. The nature of the Sixth Age may demand more Chi to fuel supernatural powers, forcing Kuei-jin to avoid using their capabilities. How diminished vampires become depends on the Chi their powers demand. At first, it might be a relatively slight increase, an additional point to use a Discipline, for example. This may increase to two or five points needed to activate any particular power, or by costs increasing 50% to 100% or beyond.

And yet, increasing Chi costs might not affect uses of Demon Chi, which seems the most economical option. Resorting to Demon Chi comes with its own risks, of course, but some Kuei-jin gladly take them to save their Yin and Yang energy. This avenue makes the Demon Arts common, perhaps a major step on the road to corruption by the Yama Kings.

THE WALL AND THE SPIRIT WORLDS

The connection between the material and spirit worlds is vital to Kuei-jin existence and capabilities. The Sixth Age undoubtedly leads to an imbalance between the realms, making the Wall harder or easier to overcome, with consequences either way.

- **Raising the Wall:** An increase in Wall strength may result from diminishing Chi levels in the world or from a widening gulf between the material and spiritual. The Wall may intensify to a particular point and then stop, or it may become impassable and spirit and matter are divided forever. See “The Rising of One Hundred Clouds” for an example of what might happen if the Wall cuts off contact between worlds, trapping the Kuei-jin in the Middle Kingdom.

An increase in Wall strength affects more than the capacity of the Wan Kuei to step from one world to another. It affects the ability to feed on ambient Chi, since the difficulty of doing so is based on local Wall rating. The result is a form of limited feeding, discussed previously, which leads to an increased need for Chi among arhats and bodhisattvas of the Hungry Dead.

- **Lowering the Wall:** Alternatively, the coming of the Age of Sorrow may batter down the Wall between worlds, or at least weaken it to a point at which passing

through is relatively easy for anyone with the means. That applies to the Yama Kings, too.

EXPERIENCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

The Fivefold Dharmas of the Kuei-jin are dedicated to achieving enlightenment. The end of your chronicle might signal the completion of the characters’ search for fulfillment. It can be an opportunity for revelation or insight that guides characters toward the peace espoused by their faiths.

Such momentous lessons may intensify the characters’ personal development in terms of both Dharma and experience. This progress allows players to enjoy, however briefly, the power possessed by arhats and ancestors, to wield great status and influence. It can be like a time-lapse film of the characters’ progress, bringing them to a point where they face the challenges of the end head on.

Opportunities for auspicious occasions and acts of blindness (*Kindred of the East*, pp. 52-53) also suit the themes of end and transition. These are indeed “interesting times” for the Kuei-jin, who face unprecedented challenges. Part of your end story may involve characters reaching enlightenment or turning away from it because of the demands of their unives.

By the same token, the momentous events happening all around them (and to them) are good reason to grant additional experience points, allowing characters to learn from hard or fateful lessons. You can even waive factors such as training, saying that the Kuei-jin have to learn by doing, acquiring their skills the hard way in such times of crisis.

If you plan to continue your chronicle into the Sixth Age, consider the effects of increased Dharma and experience on the characters. Your troupe might retire characters to become the arhats and bodhisattvas of the new Age, or you can start a new chronicle in which the characters function on an entirely different level than before thanks to their newfound insight and capabilities.

THE SECOND BREATH

A vampire’s unlife begins with the Second Breath, when the Kuei-jin’s divided spirit escapes the torment of Yomi and rends the Wall to return to its corpse (or another corpse). Whether the Second Breath is an opportunity for redemption and enlightenment or a terrible curse, it’s the very foundation of the Kuei-jin. In the Age of Sorrow, the nature or existence of the Second Breath may change, taking the Kuei-jin with it.

- **Fewer Return:** Fewer souls escape from the clutches of the Yama Kings to return to the Middle Kingdom. A sign of the dawning Sixth Age is fewer and fewer Kuei-jin coming into being. As existing ones meet Final Death, there are fewer vampires left in the world. Eventually, the number of Wan Kuei destroyed might exceed the number that come into being, diminishing their ranks ever further. Fewer Running Monkeys might seem a blessing to elders of the courts, but it also means fewer subordinates to take on various tasks and missions.

• **None Return:** At the extreme end of the spectrum is no Kuei-jin returning at all. This phenomenon may spell the eventual end of vampires. Although they are eternal, even the Wan Kuei meet Final Death in various ways. With none to replace them, their ranks thin with the passing of years until they're a mere handful. The process may take centuries or even millennia, but is inevitable. If the Kuei-jin are still faced with enemies such as the Shih and Kin-jin, the inability to replenish their ranks may lead to their extinction that much sooner.

• **More Return:** On an entirely different tack, the Age of Sorrow may arrive when an increased number of souls escape Yomi. Kuei-jin numbers grow too rapidly for the slow-moving courts to adapt. More and more Running Monkeys means more potential for imbalance, chaos and even rebellion as different factions recruit and try to create political or social power blocs. More vampires also means a greater threat that mortals will discover the existence of the Kuei-jin and take action against them. The ancestors of the August Courts might see the rise of more Kuei-jin as an opportunity, sending cannon fodder off to support the Great Leap Outward. Or population

increases could occur outside the Middle Kingdom, tarnishing the delicate purity of the Kuei-jin.

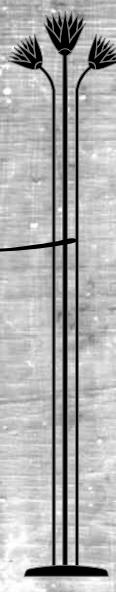
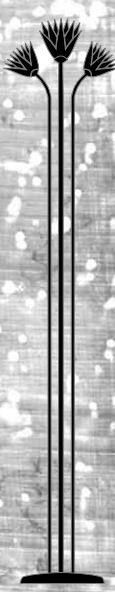
• **All Return:** What if all souls with ties to the Middle Kingdom become Kuei-jin after death? This development quickly and vastly changes the nature of undead existence, as the Hungry Dead are recognized throughout Asia and the world. Mortal authorities are overwhelmed by savage and ravenous vampires, and existing Kuei-jin quite unable to hunt and tame so many *chih-meh*. Even though many new vampires are destroyed, those killed take the Second Breath. The Age of Sorrow becomes a terrible war between the living and dead, between the lands of the Middle Kingdom and the outside world.

• **Servants of the Yama Kings:** Or the nature of the Second Breath may change in the Sixth Age. Perhaps the souls that escape Yomi do not escape at all, but are released by the Yama Kings to become Kuei-jin, or more specifically *akuma* dedicated to demonic service. These vampires are sworn to obey even before their souls leave Hell. They rise in control of their vampiric nature and take up duties to corrupt existing Kuei-jin, reducing all to servitude. It's only a matter of time before unclaimed Wan Kuei are a hunted minority.





trabhold



Chapter 5

Mummy: The Resurrection

"Armageddon"

"AND HE GATHERED THEM TOGETHER IN A PLACE
CALLED ARMAGEDDON. AND THE SEVENTH ANGEL
POURED FORTH HIS BOWL, AND A VOICE CRIED OUT
FROM HEAVEN SAYING, IT IS DONE."

—REVELATION 16:16

LAST SUNRISE

Hatshepsut, Lady of the Disciples of Anubis, Champion of Ma'at, Chosen of Osiris, stood on the rooftop in Cairo and awaited the dawn. She was certain it would come, but not so certain about the one after that. She took careful note of each moment. She had seen countless sunrises before, but the possibility of there being no more made this one important. She watched as the face of Ra colored the eastern horizon in shades of violet, gold and orange before the golden disk of the sun appeared, sending the first rays of light stretching across the city.

It was not the city — not the world — that she knew. The buildings were strangely shaped, and tall. The streets were filled with cars. The air reeked of alien smells. The people wore strange clothes and worshipped foreign gods. But the sky, the sky and the sunrise were still as Hatshepsut remembered them. The light of Ra was as unchanged by the passage of time as she was.

Even as the sun rose, Hatshepsut felt a chill in the air. She had clung to the unchanging aspects of the world to see her through millennia of life and death, and now her homeland was alien to her. Even those things she thought would never change were different now. Nothing, it seemed, was truly eternal. Not even the gods themselves. Certainly not those who believed themselves immortal.

"Lady?" the voice of an acolyte interrupted her thoughts. Hatshepsut turned to see the young woman standing shyly by the door of the rooftop garden, clearly wishing that she had not been required to interrupt her mistress' meditation. *Was I so young once?* the Nile Queen wondered to herself, looking at the girl.

"What is it, child?" she asked as gently as she could.

"There is news," the acolyte replied gravely. "Please come."

Hatshepsut knew that her helpers, both mortal and immortal, had shielded her from certain aspects of the modern world. There was simply too much to take in all at once after lifetimes spent in the shadow world of the dead, standing guard against the coming of Apophis. There was so very much to learn, but no time — no time whatsoever. Hatshepsut learned what she needed to, and left the rest to the youngsters.

They had shown her the television, and Hatshepsut understood it at least in concept. The way it showed images of distant places, and how it was used primarily for entertainment, presenting dramas and comedies that were more like dreams made real than plays. Now the television showed images quite familiar to her.

"The Pyramids," an acolyte said. "They say people have seen ghosts, that there is panic and rioting."



Hatshepsut looked at the images of people running about madly. She listened to their cries of terror and anger. A voice said something about attempts to restore order, but she barely listened. The chill she'd felt on the rooftop deepened.

"What does it mean?" one of her aides asked, and the immortal Hatshepsut shook her head sadly. She took a deep breath, momentarily enjoying the ability to breathe, of being alive, like the last bite of a fine meal.

"It has begun," she finally said.

"What has, mistress?"

"The end." Then she squared her shoulders, raised her head proudly like the queen she was, and regarded her shocked and frightened followers.

"Come," she said. "There is much we must do."

INTRODUCTION

All things must come to and end, or so mortals believe. But the Undying, those reborn into immortal life, know that what seems to be an end can also be a beginning. Perhaps the beginning of something never-ending. And yet, the immortals of the World of Darkness see growing portents. The signs suggest that efforts to restore the balance, to serve as champions of life may have come too late. Everywhere there are marks of corruption and the rising power of Apophis. It seems that the Undying, who once had all eternity stretched out before them, are running out of time.

This chapter details the end of the World of Darkness as seen by the Undying — the mummies of Egypt, Asia and South America described in **Mummy: The Resurrection** and the **Mummy Players Guide**. It describes several different approaches to the last days of the Reborn, and how they deal with the end of an existence they once thought would never end. Like all finales in this book, these scenarios are speculative, some possibilities of what might happen. As always, the ultimate direction of your story is up to you.

THEMES

The various themes of **Mummy** — hope, responsibility and duality — are reflected in this chapter's possibilities for the end.

HOPE

How do you maintain hope when faced with the imminent end of the world? That's the question the Undying must answer when face to face with the power of Apophis the Corruptor. It's easy for characters to despair, to surrender to the inevitable, but the Amenti and the

other immortals have undergone many trials to get to where they are. They have passed through death, terror and resurrection to become champions of life. It's easy for the Undying to have hope when they're assured of immortality, but quite another thing when faced with final mortality. Do they endure or give up? Can they convince others to fight and to hope until the very end?

RESPONSIBILITY

The gift of immortality comes at a price. The Undying are protectors of Balance, furthering its cause in the world. They have always waged a difficult battle, but now it seems the Amenti and their allies are losing. The world has tipped so far out of balance, sliding toward its inevitable doom, that there seems no chance for the immortals to right things. Does that mean they can abandon their responsibilities and the oaths they swore when they became Undying, or do they hold to them no matter what happens? The end times are the ultimate test of the Undying. Are they the champions they've been chosen and trained as, or not?

DUALITY

The Undying represent a union of opposites: ancient and modern, living and dead, alive yet immortal and ageless, human and more than human. Ideally, they embody the balance between these opposites. The balance of the Undying is also the key to their success — to one degree or another — against the forces of corruption. They are walkers between worlds, able to operate equally well in the lands of the living and the dead, attuned to both matter and spirit, knowledgeable in what lies beyond the veil of death. If they can harness these qualities, the immortals of the World of Darkness have the potential to save it, although their victory may come at a very high price.

MOOD

The mood of the end is certainly a somber one, but it needn't be hopeless. After all, the Undying are all about hope in the face of overwhelming darkness and despair. The arrival of the end can evoke a number of different moods.

FEAR

There may be nothing more fearful for an immortal than the imminent and unavoidable approach of death. Even for the Amenti, who have experienced death before, there is a certain chill inherent to what lies beyond the Judges of Ma'at and the Blessed Fields of A'aru. What happens to them when even death meets its ultimate end at the fangs of the Great Serpent? What lies beyond the





great darkness and nothingness of Oblivion? There is good reason for the Undying to fear the end.

This mood is important because it brings substance to the Amenti's struggles. It's one thing when the Undying carry out their duties secure in the knowledge they will eventually return from death. It's another to know that the end is truly for *everything*, including them.

DISAPPOINTMENT

Ever feel like you paid full price to see a movie and only caught the closing credits? That's how many of the Amenti feel. They were promised eternal life in exchange for becoming champions of Ma'at. Now, only a few shorts years after that promise was made, they're faced with the possible end of everything. Doesn't seem very fair, does it? Elder mummies like the Shemsu-heru and some of the other immortals — even creatures such as vampires — have had the opportunity to enjoy centuries of existence, but the Amenti are practically newborns. They've only just tasted immortality and now it's snatched away from them. If they allow it, that is.

For some of the Undying, this disappointment may turn into righteous anger and strength of purpose. They'll be damned if they're going to let the end come now that they're immortal! Others may feel deceived by the tem-akh and Osiris. Did those powers know what was coming? Were the Amenti tricked into becoming cannon fodder for a final war between Osiris and Apophis? Some Undying may despair, denied the chance for the eternal life they were promised.

RESOLVE

If the definition of courage is being afraid, but facing that fear and acting in spite of it, then the Undying haven't had many opportunities to demonstrate true courage. Once they underwent the Spell of Life and became immortal, what did they have to fear? Not even death could hold them forever. Now they're faced with the possibility of losing everything they've gained — not just death but destruction. Now the Undying have a chance to demonstrate what they're made of, to live up to the potential that the tem-akh and Osiris saw in them. These people swore to fight against Apophis and its minions, but did they really know what they were in for?

Some of the most dramatic moments in fiction and history involve people faced with imminent doom, the ultimate test of their convictions. Do they fold in the crunch or are they willing to do whatever it takes to have a chance of victory, even if it means making the ultimate sacrifice? That is the test the Undying face now.

THE MUMMY PLAYERS GUIDE

The scenarios and information in this chapter assume you have access to the **Mummy Players Guide**, specifically the material on Asian and South American mummies and recent events in the world of the Reborn. This material is not strictly necessary to play end scenarios involving the Egyptian Amenti or their final battle against Apophis, but it can be very helpful.

TALES OF THE END

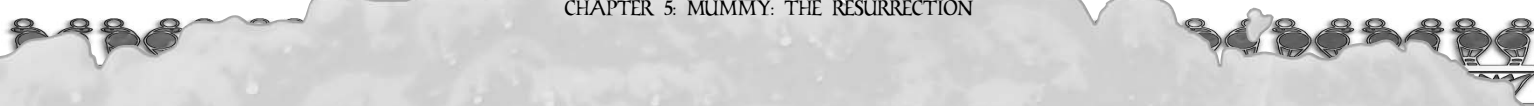
This chapter offers several different scenarios for ending the world as the Undying know it, including a concept for each of the three different types of mummies. Feel free to use one or parts of all in whatever way suits your chronicle.

"Apophis Ascends" describes the Amenti's final confrontation with an avatar of Apophis. A wraith called Eurydice has risen and seized upon occult knowledge that has infused her with the Great Serpent's power. Now she intends to consume the Apepnu, the dread champions of Apophis, to subsume their power. With it, she will be able to shepherd in the end of the world and the rise of the Corruptor, unless the Amenti can stop her.

"The World Goes Westward" details the fate of the Teomallki mummies of South America. The origin and nature of the ancient immortals ties into the end of the world, making them key players in the way things come to pass. Are the Teomallki slaves to fate, or can they choose the future?

"Dawn of the Age of Sorrow" looks at the end from the perspective of the Wu T'ian, the Taoist immortals of Asia. As the Wheel of Ages turns and the forces of Yomi gain strength, the Family of Heaven rallies for a final struggle against the demon lords and their minions, with an eye toward preserving knowledge and wisdom for ages yet to come. Will they fade quietly away as the Demon Emperor ascends to his throne, or fight to the bitter end against the inevitable?

"Long Day's Journey into Night" focuses on the end through the sundering of the Shroud between worlds. The corrupt wraith Eurydice seeks to merge the material and spirit worlds to create an age in which death has no meaning and Apophis rules over all. Mummies must travel into the depths of the Underworld, braving the fury of the Dja-akh to find an ancient spell that can create a new Shroud and separate the realms, but only with a great and terrible sacrifice. Are the characters willing to do what is necessary to fulfill their purpose and safeguard the world?





SIGNS IN THE DUST

Signs of the rising power of Apophis and the approach of the end times have appeared for some time, although many choose not to see them or interpret them incorrectly. As the time of Apophis' rise draws near, portents become more and more common for the Amenti and the other immortals of the World of Darkness.

Feel free to introduce the signs and omens described here to foreshadow the end of your **Mummy** chronicle, and as examples for your own signals of the end.



"One of the holiest sites in the world became the site for religious and political violence today as Jews and Muslims clashed outside the Temple of the Rock in Jerusalem. The Muslim mosque is built on the site of an ancient Hebrew temple. Until recently, the Israeli government allowed the Islamic mosque, along with numerous other religious sites,

THE SERPENT'S VENOM

From cable news reports:

"Violence continues in the Middle East tonight as Israeli military forces seek Palestinian terrorists in the West Bank region. Earlier this week, Israeli attack helicopters fired rockets at several cars believed to carry terrorists, killing seven and injuring 46, while Israeli troops opened fire on protestors during a house-to-house search, killing 11 and wounding as many as 35. Palestinian authorities call the attacks 'completely unprovoked,' while the Israelis insist that the Palestinians harbor terrorists."

to operate freely in the city of Jerusalem. Jewish protesters gathered outside the Dome of the Rock today, however, proclaiming, 'The temple will be rebuilt,' apparently referring to the Jewish temple that once stood there. The demonstration led to conflict with local Muslims, as authorities attempted to quell the riot."



"An Israeli Defense Force spokesman today named a previously unknown religious sect called 'the Amkhat' as the target of recent incursions into Tulkarm and other West Bank towns. An IDF dossier released to the press accuses this cult of a wide variety of outrages, from terrorist activities to ritual cannibalism. Palestinian

Authority representatives called Israeli claims inflammatory, but insiders suggest that the Authority has been trying to root out Amkhat for some time. Meanwhile, Egypt announced that it was withdrawing support from the current round peace of talks, citing the Tulkarm incursions and 'Israeli fabrications.'"



"Protests took place in Syria today over U.S. rhetoric that some Syrians say is both threatening and 'war-mongering,' as the United States consolidates control over Iraq. The protestors believe statements made by U.S. officials suggest that the United States is prepared to launch a military offensive against Syria if it does not fully comply with U.S. plans for Iraq and Middle East peace. Syrian authorities proclaim they are unwilling to 'negotiate under threat of war' and continue to voice demands for the United States to clearly outline its plans for the future of Iraq and the region."

From a classified U.S. National Security Council report:

"...clear evidence that weapons of mass destruction have been smuggled out of the region and may be in the hands of terrorists affiliated or allied with the former regime. These weapons may include chemical, biological and nuclear devices of limited capability, but more

than sufficient to inflict devastation on a massive scale, particularly to concentrated urban areas. Potential targets include disputed areas in the Middle East as well as sensitive U.S. sites both domestic and international."

RA HIDES HIS FACE

From CNN.com:

No Explanation for Mid-East Eclipse

Experts remain baffled by what they can only call an "unexplained phenomenon" involving a total solar eclipse seen in the Middle East earlier today. No eclipse was expected, since the moon's orbit does not bring it directly in front of the sun for another two months, when an eclipse is expected to occur across parts of North America. Nonetheless, the event appeared exactly like a solar eclipse, which obscured the face of the sun and





was visible in Cairo, Alexandria, and parts of Palestine, Syria and Saudi Arabia. The “eclipse” lasted for just over 20 minutes, and was filmed by numerous news and media outlets in the region, as well as by scientists.

Although explanations have been offered ranging from orbiting space debris to a close pass by a “rogue” asteroid, experts dismiss them as “highly unlikely.”

Sign seen carried in a crowd in Cairo:

Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt.

Exodus 10:21

From a post on the alt.conspiracies newsgroup:

The facade is crumbling! The eclipse in the Middle East wasn't meant to happen, and it's evidence that they're getting sloppy. “Orbiting debris” my ass! It was orbiting, that's for sure, but it wasn't any kind of debris. It's connected with the “newly discovered” star that doesn't have any kind of normal stellar properties, you can bet on that, and they're going to try and cover it up. I've got five different samples of footage already, and there's more on the net every day. Look it up for yourself and don't be fooled by what goes out over official channels. Keep watching the skies!

PLAGUES UPON EGYPT

SIDS Epidemic Sparks Panic in Middle East

CAIRO — A mysterious and massive outbreak of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or SIDS has sparked fears of an epidemic in Egypt and parts of the Middle East. Over the past week, over 600 newborns have died of unexplained causes in hospitals throughout Egypt. Physicians and medical experts say that while sudden and unexplained deaths do occur with some infants, the breadth of these events is completely unprecedented, and may represent an unknown infection of some kind.

“SIDS is not a contagious disease,” says Dr. Mariq Hanoush of Cairo. “This epidemic clearly involves something beyond random chance. Frankly, we're at a loss.”

Egyptian authorities have declared a state of emergency and called upon the assistance of the World Health Organization. The Centers for Disease Control have also volunteered experts and resources to help contain and possibly isolate the cause of the fatalities.

From Nurit ab-Rachel's diary:

November 12

I'm writing this down, because someone needs to. Even with all that I've seen and been through, I don't know that

I entirely believe it myself. Writing things down helps me sort it out a little.

It rained frogs today in Alexandria. I can hardly believe it, but it did. An unexpected storm swept in from the sea. At first it was just like a late season thunderstorm, but then I saw them.

Frogs. They were falling out of the sky, hundreds of them. They were everywhere. They were hopping through the streets, jumping off awnings, all over the place. It was crazy, and it messed up traffic really bad. Nobody knew why it happened. Most just passed it off as one of those freaky things, but a lot of people said it was a bad sign, including some of the women from the Cult of Isis. I haven't gotten familiar enough with the astrology to follow it all, but I hope they're wrong.

November 15

Why did it have to be snakes? Haha. That isn't even funny, but I'm kind of freaked out and I don't know what to say. Snakes have appeared all over Egypt and the Sinai. Already at least 20 people have died from bites, and there are lots more in the hospital. Nobody knows where they're coming from, and nobody around here can forget that snakes are associated with Set and Apophis.

Rains of frogs. Now snakes. I can't believe it. I just pray that it isn't true. I wish there was more I could do than just volunteer with some of the sisters to help people in the city. It feels like I should be *doing* something, but I just don't know what. It makes me so frustrated I want to scream.

November 21

It's true. The plagues of Egypt. Swarms of locusts are infesting places all along the Nile. Nobody knows why. It's the wrong time of year. None of it makes any scientific sense, but that's because science has nothing to do with it. It's not the will of God, either. It's Apophis. He must have a really twisted sense of humor.

I just looked back over what I wrote. I still can't believe it, but there's no denying it now. It's like somebody died around here. Everyone knows what's happening, but nobody wants to talk about it. The head priestesses spend a lot of time either studying or doing rituals, but I don't know what for.

December 3

A message has arrived from Cairo and I'm leaving as soon as I finish writing this. I'm leaving my diary with the sisters of the Cult of Isis. I know they'll take care of it in case I don't come back. This might be my last entry. There are a few things I want to say.



The truth is that I'm scared out of my mind, but at the same time I'm glad that I've finally got something I can do. I can't just sit around while the whole world falls apart. I just think about my family and everybody else's families.

God, it's too big to understand, but I agreed when Rachel came to me to find a better way to live. I swore that I would follow and uphold Ma'at. I got another chance at life, and that means I owe the world. If there's anything I can do to stop Apophis, I'm going to do it.

I guess there's not much more to say except, if you're reading this and we won, make sure that it wasn't for nothing. Remember how bad it got and how close we came. It's just like what happened to me, what happened to all of us before we were reborn. If When the world gets a second chance like we did, live like every moment counts. I don't know who you are but I love you. We all do. That's why we're doing this.

Nurit ab-Rachel

Graffiti seen in an alley in Cairo:

RAIN OF FIRE RAIN OF
FIRE RAIN OF FIRE RAIN
OF

APOPHIS ASCENDS

Osiris and Isis created the first Egyptian mummies to defend the world from the minions of Apophis. These Shemsu-heru waged war upon the undead children of Set, and upon the seven immortal blasphemies known as the Apepnu. As the conflict dragged on for millennia, the champions of Osiris lost their way, diminished by the

weight of ennui, selfishness and the seeming futility of their burdensome quest. And so they failed, and the howling winds of the Dja-akh scoured the beloved city of Amenti. Those mummies reborn in the modern era from the ancient and modern dead owe their existence to the failure of their predecessors. And yet, out of failure and despair, hope arises. The Amenti awaken with new purpose and passion, certain they have both the power to save the world and an eternity in which to do it.

They're wrong.

Apophis stirs. In ages past, the Great Serpent was as the hydra, its power spread among many fangs and eyes. Now, the Corruptor gazes upon the world with its own red eye, as a star in the heavens. Loyal cultists cull the ranks of monsters and reclaim the scattered shards of their dead god's soul. The bloodline of Set and the brood of the Corruptor falls to treachery in back alleys and hidden crypts. Even the mighty Apepnu find themselves hunted by demons they do not know, roughly cast aside in favor of a new champion.

The final battle between the champions of Ma'at and Apophis is at hand.

PRELUDE: THE COMING OF EURYDICE

When a tem-akh appears to a new ghost and offers a second chance at life, the soul must accept the joining. Most do. The dead crave life as nothing else and hungrily seize upon any chance at renewed warmth and breath. Yet, some ghosts refuse the gift of resurrection for reasons





of madness, pride or cynicism. It's their right, and none get another chance. Such ghosts may go on with their shadowed afterlives, clinging to the wan sustenance of memory and regret. One such soul was Eurydice.

Eurydice's true name remains lost to her along with most of the details of her life. When the ancient soul of a tem-akh appeared before her and spoke of rebirth and hope, she recoiled in fear and demanded that the shade leave her alone. Saddened, the tem-akh departed and found another host. This would have ended the ghost's story in the greater tale of the Amenti, were it not for the woman's unusual tenacity. After a time in the Underworld, she was eventually led back to her corpse, where she found the strength to rise as one of the walking dead. Touched by the wisps of memory left by her brief contact with the tem-akh, the ghost knew that her destiny somehow lay in Egypt. She made her own perilous *haji* to the Web of Faith and sought out the cultists of which the tem-akh had spoken. She represented sorrow to them, for they could not give her life, and so they turned her away to find her own path.

The nameless revenant remained in the Holy Lands, watching and ultimately envying the Reborn from afar. She grew obsessed with resurrection, even as her relentless *khaibit* gnawed at her nobler self. Envy grew to hate; she felt abandoned and betrayed. She thought it unjust that she could not have life when corpse after corpse stumbled from the far corners of the world to breathe again. She blamed the tem-akh for failing to overcome her fear. When her hate and the whispers of the Devourer swallowed the last of her soul, she followed the voice of corruption to a hidden cell of Amkhat cannibal-sorcerers. In a defiled crypt hidden deep in the sands, she interrupted the cult's bloody feast and butchered them one by one until the remainder bowed before her.

Aided by her new servants, the embittered Eurydice began a bold plot to *steal* the resurrection she believed the world owed her. Her agents roamed the Web of Faith and kidnapped sorcerers faithful to Osiris, but such victims proved useless. They knew only part of the ritual, and even then only the part that required access to the Life force of Osiris. Eurydice personally captured one of the Amenti, but this victim knew even less about the Spell of Life, and so she turned his flesh over to her servants. All seemed hopeless...

Until Kemintiri found her.

Known and feared among vampires as an ancient, maddened demigod, Kemintiri stumbled out of the moon-draped dunes like a prophet of old. In her veins flowed the blood of Set, first Chosen of Apophis, and her shattered mind held revelations better left unspoken. Something called Kemintiri away from her masquerade

among the undead, from her endless, pointless series of impersonations. Something called her into the deep desert of Egypt to receive a prophecy and a message: Eurydice would live again, and vanished Set would no longer bear favor as the Chosen of Apophis.

Eurydice offered gracious hospitality to her strange and godlike guest, butchering servants when they failed to bring sufficient victims to satisfy the ancient's hunger. Yet, little more than mad rambles escaped Kemintiri's blood-soaked lips. In time, Eurydice grew impatient with the babble. She had heard enough. As Set's child lay writhing in the throes of some seizure or revelation one evening — Eurydice no longer cared which — the arisen ghost plunged a stake into the vampire's heart. Kemintiri stilled and muttered no more. Under orders from their ambitious leader, the Amkhat took the blood of the captive and worked foul alchemy upon it. Captured ramblings and fragmented notes merged with stolen and forbidden necromancy. Together, the Amkhat made their own mockery of the Spell of Life, crude and rooted in magic older and deeper than they could possibly know.

Finally, a great assembly of the Amkhat met in a secret place for the casting of the spell. Fully one-third perished when the magic grew beyond their control and sucked away their souls. Infused with alchemy distilled from the blood of Kemintiri, and through the blood of the first Chosen of Apophis, Eurydice was transformed. For seven agonizing beats her heart pumped. Seven breaths filled her dead lungs. Yet, she did not live, and out of failure she became something more, something terrible. The favor of her god lay upon her with dread purpose and she knew at last how she might live again. Apophis stirred beneath the realm of the dead, rising in slow coils. He would be her tem-akh and she was now his chosen instrument of ascent. All she needed was to reclaim the seven *ifrit* of the Great Serpent's soul from those who dared to call themselves the Children of Apophis. Their death would be her life.

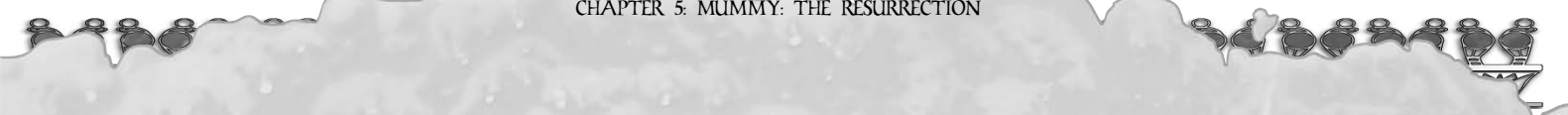
And her life would birth Apophis into the world.

ASSASSINATION

As the story begins, Eurydice has sent her stalkers (see p. 190) to locate and slay the seven Apepnu. The characters should discover this plot early enough to intervene before Eurydice grows too powerful. Presented here are the two most likely discovery scenes.

THE FACE OF EVIL

The characters have already been tracking the actions of a Bane Mummy, perhaps as part of an earlier story. Well prepared with equipment, architectural plans and strategy,





they break into one of the ancient fiend's lairs only to find the mangled corpses of its guards strewn about, and the walls spattered with warm gore. The dwarf carefully works its way through secret passages, half-sprung traps and other obstacles to the innermost sanctum of the fortified haven. There the characters find their undying quarry kneeling, battered and bleeding, surrounded by a pack of strange animal-headed creatures. Before any of the characters can intervene, the leader of the pack strikes a deathblow and inserts a long tongue into one of the Apepnu's wounds. Sickly green light flows into the fanged muzzle, and the lifeless body of the mummy falls to the ground. It is then that the creatures notice the characters, growling at them and crouching to pounce. As the characters leap into the fray or prepare for attack, the leader of the beasts barks an order in its strange rasping language and the entire pack dissolves into wisps of fine sand. Alone in the silence of the abattoir, the characters may retrieve the corpse of their slain enemy or simply escape to inform their superiors.

AN UNLIKELY TALE

Less militant Amenti might learn about the strange assassination of the Bane Mummy indirectly. Superiors may forward transcripts and reports provided by immortals who directly observed such events. Alternatively, the characters' dwarf might be called to assist in the interrogation of a mortal witness who hid and saw everything occur in a more public area. Such a witness is unreliable at best, and probably quite mad from the sheer horror of events. Information obtained is rife with falsehoods and exaggerations, while containing enough truth to scare the characters and suggest the arrival of a new player in the immortal game.

For a stranger twist, the characters might be approached by a four-jar or other thrall of the murdered Apepnu. The being is willing to trade information for protection from the characters. The dwarf may not trust such a tainted informant and might well suspect a trap. But then, what could scare an undead monster so badly that it would turn to its *enemies* for safety? Such an encounter should shake the characters and impress upon them the degree of danger posed by the mysterious destroyers.

Regardless of how the characters learn of the first assassination, it is not the last. Within a week, another Bane Mummy dies under similarly gruesome circumstances. It's clear that someone — or something — systematically hunts the Apepnu. The five remaining Bane Mummies scatter, each suspecting one another of masterminding events. The leadership of the Amenti shares this suspicion, yet none of the evidence points to

any of the survivors as suspects. No one wants to believe that there might be a new power at work in the world, least of all the Children of Apophis.

STALKING THE STALKERS

In the wake of the two assassinations, the remaining Apepnu go to ground. Many of their known agents or associates retreat into seclusion or avoid their usual hang-outs. Amenti leaders sense that this conflict is more than a turf war among the Children of Apophis. Such undying monsters have little reason to fear assassination attempts, except as a temporary setback. And yet, the Bane Mummies hide and send their most trusted agents across the world searching for answers. It soon becomes apparent that they are truly afraid, and that fear makes them vulnerable. How the characters investigate this situation depends on their strengths and upon your needs.

DIGGING FOR CLUES

The characters may seek out the killers, trying to find out the identity and origin of the strange monstrosities. Such an investigation may follow any number of paths. The characters can hunt in old occult libraries and somehow buy, barter or even break into private collections on the trail of vague references and tantalizing clues. All Research rolls made for such an obscure subject as the stalkers has a minimum difficulty of 8, with successes yielding assorted, elusive clues. For example, a single success might reveal that figures bearing strong resemblance to the animal-headed assassins appear on a cartouche unearthed at a dig south of Abydos. The characters can then track down this cartouche and translate it, which in turn points them elsewhere. Players should not feel that they get the run-around, but their characters should sense the obscurity and elusiveness of their quarry. Amenti familiar with the supernatural might assume the attacks were carried out by werewolves or other shapeshifters, but all their research (as well as any direct experience) suggests otherwise. These are *not* werewolves.

Useful facts the characters might obtain through research include the following.

- Although sunlight does them no harm, the beasts hunt only at night (three successes).
- The creatures serve Apophis directly, and only the greatest champions of the Great Serpent may control them (four successes).
- These "stalkers" have the power to travel as fast as a racing sandstorm, and to smell sin like desert beasts smell water (five successes).
- The ritual used to summon these stalkers requires large quantities of human blood and specific herbs and





unguents. Enterprising characters might track recent acquisitions of such materials and reference missing-person reports in surrounding areas.

CALLING IN OLD DEBTS

Mummies less interested in archeology and bookwork can investigate directly, approaching longtime informants and those “in the know” about the twilight world of the supernatural. It takes little effort to recognize the undercurrent of fear at work. Old contacts don’t want to talk or claim retirement from the business, but very few have any idea of what is actually happening. Vampires of Set’s bloodline may know that a few of their older members have disappeared. Other vampires don’t have a clue, except for the most sorcery inclined, and they can offer only vague omens and auguries of impending doom. Mages may know more, if only because some of them focus on seeing and anticipating the future. Comets, ill-omens and other portents allude to something horrible coming, and all signs point back to the Middle East and the Web of Faith. It’s not much to go on, but enough to set the stage for deeper inquiry and to establish a tone of foreboding. Extremely fortunate and/or well-connected characters can learn about a recent shakeup in the leadership of the Amkhat and the rise of a new priestess in the cult. The Amkhat should not appear as likely suspects in the assassinations, however, at least not at first.

THE FIEND OF MY FIEND

Instead of tracking the killers, the characters may focus on the victims. Unfortunately, investigation into the slain Apepnu reveals little of worth. The beings were up to their necks in dirty deals and schemes, but that’s to be expected. Indeed, nothing about their unfinished plots seems any more or less despicable than any of their other exploits. Profiling to discover what made the slain immortals any different from their counterparts suggests one possible link: Both of the two perished in strongholds that they had established long ago. In short, they died where someone in the know might reasonably expect to find them. With the rest of the Apepnu scattered, that common thread no longer applies.

RACING THE HUNT

In a slight variation of the preceding investigation, the characters can hunt down the surviving Apepnu — or at least try to. Such a feat is extremely dangerous, regardless of success. The quarry learn of the search and send minions to deal with the meddlesome sleuths, or the stalkers discover the search in progress and allow the characters to lead the way to the prey. An extremely “successful” investigation might lead the characters into

the grasp of a paranoid Bane Mummy eager to make an example of any rival or threat. The ancient monster might even believe the characters are assassins come to kill him. Those unfortunate enough to be captured by the Apepnu can probably look forward to a slow and painful demise, unless rescued.

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSRE

If the characters do not seem to grasp the gravity of the situation or if their investigation leads down dead ends, you may consider upping the stakes. Another Bane Mummy dies, but not without taking out a city block — or a city district — with powerful Dark Hekau. Such a cataclysm certainly points to a previously unconsidered danger: the possibility that innocent bystanders may suffer or perish as a result of the mysterious power struggle. In any case, another Bane Mummy should eventually die during the course of the investigation.

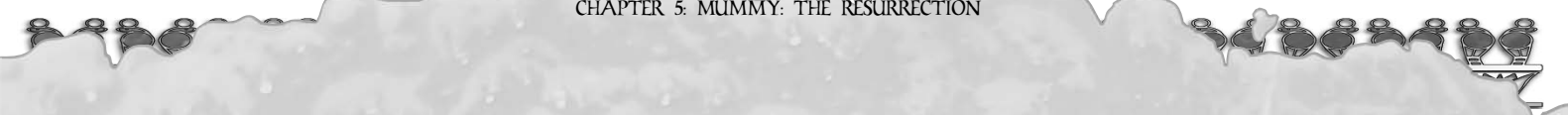
THE GATHERING STORM

With the third murder among the Apepnu, the Djaakh abruptly stops. The shrieking clouds pull back into the dark recesses of Duat and an eerie calm settles over the land of the dead. However welcome, the lull feels distinctly unnatural — less a sign of peace than the rushing out of the tide before a tsunami. Worldwide, the Shroud rating drops by one to a minimum score of 2 in any location. Mediums, psychics and mages blessed with prescience suffer dreams rife with ill portents. They’re haunted by images of a red star and of a maimed hydra cleaved of its many heads. Characters may experience such dreams, or ones with similar symbolism. It doesn’t take much to recognize their likely (and accurate) significance: Apophis recalls its own. What was once many gathers to one. The Apepnu are not being murdered, they’re being *harvested*.

As portents grow worse and the characters come to grasp the plot underway, their investigation should bear fruit and leads them to Eurydice and the Amkhat. Either of the following revelations proves useful.

BURIED OMENS

Research into the stalkers eventually leads to a previously undiscovered crypt located anywhere you choose. Inside, a torpid vampire lies in a sarcophagus surrounded by prophetic murals. The pictures narrate the rise and fall of the Amkhat through many civilizations, some of which history does not record or remember. The last picture shows a bloody harvest. The Eaters of Flesh prostrate themselves like wheat before the dead flesh of a woman on a throne, a coiled serpent on her brow. Half again the number of the prostrated lie cut





down in their own blood. Behind the goddess is a black sun, and each of its rays is the unmistakable form of a lunging stalker.

A NEST OF VIPERS

All the leads, tracing of alchemical supplies and mysterious disappearances point to a rural village in Egypt or Palestine. The clues may actually be a trap set by Eurydice or a canny aide, in which case the characters may have to fight their way free from well-armed cultists. A red herring of this magnitude should certainly point the way to the Eurydice's true location, allowing players to feel a sense of progress.

Alternatively, the village is as it appears. This is where Eurydice first summoned her stalkers, and the characters might even find the remains of Kemintiri in a cistern or deep cellar. The new Chosen of Apophis is long gone, having sought a more auspicious location for her ascension. She may also have left surprises or assassins behind to ensure that she is not interrupted during her apotheosis. In any case, the characters may have the opportunity to interrogate a captured Amkhat cultist. He proudly boasts, "Eurydice will devour the flesh of the sun. In darkness she will feast upon the children of Osiris, and all the world shall be her banquet."

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

As Eurydice's plot draws close to completion, more Apepnu die. The manner of their passing is irrelevant unless you want to explore it with character involvement. The Bane Mummies are beings of immense power, and their passing should not be wholly without incident. Whether slain after fierce, earthshaking battle or cut down pathetically where they hide, they continue to die.

When two Apepnu remain, emissaries of Saatet-ta, the self-appointed "Darkener of the Earth," approach the Amenti with an offer. She will cooperate toward the singular goal of eliminating Eurydice. In exchange, she wants protection. It's clear that Saatet-ta does not seek defection. Her motives are not pure; corruption still festers in her soul. Yet, she does not want to die, and her selfishness makes her an unlikely ally. Before the leaders of the Amenti reply, Eurydice's assassins strike again and Saatet-ta becomes the last of her kind. The chosen of Osiris no longer have a choice. Eurydice must not gain the last *ifrit*. She must not complete her dread ritual. Horus himself issues a response to Saatet-ta and a distasteful order to the Shemsu-heru: "Preserve the Ebon Horror of Khutu." The Amenti accept her deal.

Saatet-ta arrives garbed in regal illusion, accompanied by reaper bodyguards. The characters stand

by as Horus receives the Bane Mummy and gives his word on behalf of the Amenti, as she demands. The disgust shared by the two does not lead to violence, but the desire for it is palpable. Horus leaves and entrusts Saatet-ta to the characters. As a hidden "safe house" is established in a remote location, the last of the Apepnu enjoys taunting her reluctant guardians. She assures them they will be granted swift and painless passage into Oblivion when the truce ends — as a reward, of course. Torment shall fall upon Horus, she claims. The characters may realize the desperation in her taunts. She fears for her existence and deeply resents the need for help. Ultimately, Saatet-ta is all talk. She wouldn't dare raise a finger against the characters for fear of incurring the wrath of Horus, whom she fears only slightly less than she does Eurydice.

As expected, the next night sees the first assassination attempt. A trio of stalkers materializes in Saatet-ta's bedchambers, while others systematically and quietly eliminate all of her reapers and any mortal guards. The characters quickly turn the tide of battle, as the stalkers had not planned or prepared for Amenti interference. The momentary surprise gives Saatet-ta a chance to snare one of the creatures in bindings of black lightning. A few more turns of combat follow, but the surviving stalkers retreat in a spray of sand. The captive stalker writhes and strains at its bonds, futilely trying to dissipate through the ward. It soon runs out of strength and can only snarl impotently. Saatet-ta boasts and brags, jeering at the caged beast — but she still maintains a healthy distance. The stalker barks something incomprehensible at her, clearly an insult by the pallor she assumes.

The Bane Mummy turns her angry gaze from the beast and boasts that she can follow the stalker to its source and catch Eurydice by surprise. She tries to bully the characters into accompanying her, but resorts to cajoling and ultimately playing on their moral obligation if they refuse. Whenever and however they accept (and possibly even if they do not), she seizes an amulet from beneath her clothes and throws it to the floor. It flashes a putrid green, and painfully tears the characters across space toward Eurydice's lair.

ARMAGEDDON

When the light and roaring winds fade, the dwarf finds itself on the outskirts of a small town. Characters with appropriate knowledge may recognize the place as the focus of recent religious conflict among mortals. Few people remain in the town, and many buildings have been reduced to ruin. If the characters theorize this is the



work of Eurydice and her Amkhat, Saatet-ta corrects them, saying, "This is what men do to their own kind. They bring ruin and pain upon themselves."

As Saatet-ta finishes her observation, armed soldiers emerge and confront the dwarf. They approach with weapons drawn and demand that the characters present identification papers. They may even attack outright if the characters show visible weapons. The characters have less than a minute to talk their way past the troops before Saatet-ta casts a lethal necromantic spell that burns the lot to stinking ash. The Bane Mummy does not apologize for her action, but insistently leads the characters on into the rubble.

Following Saatet-ta, the dwarf eventually locates and enters a damaged building, the cracked foundation of which opens upon a descending staircase of ancient design. The characters can smell smoke wafting from below. At the bottom of the stairs, the group finds a corridor opening into a wide stone platform. A vaulted cathedral ceiling looms far above. The musty air and lingering scent of death betrays the place as a crypt of some kind. The interlopers' attention is immediately drawn to Eurydice herself, resplendent and hypnotically beautiful as she stands unabashedly naked in the center of the platform. Around her crouch any remaining stalkers, which fawn and whimper like dogs, while 49 robed Amkhat priests stand in a circle at the edge of the platform. The chamber's illumination springs from torch sconces chiseled into

the walls. Heavy incense burns with clouds of smoke gathering high above.

Eurydice turns immediately, casting brief, dismissive appraisal over Saatet-ta and the Amenti. She exchanges brief taunts with the Bane Mummy and then unleashes her stalkers with a casual wave. The pack comes snarling at the characters while Saatet-ta unleashes an angry torrent of destructive magic at Eurydice. The Chosen of Apophis casually swats the spell aside and begins draining Saatet-ta of her Corruption. Try as they might, the characters cannot intervene due to the attacking monsters (and even if the stalkers aren't an issue, the dwarf probably has no viable means of preventing Eurydice's action at this time). When Eurydice finishes absorbing the power of Saatet-ta, the wraith smiles horrifically and falls limp to the ground. The Amkhat begin chanting a broken version of the Spell of Life. Saatet-ta recognizes the rite in utter horror before she, too, collapses at the edge of death.

The characters must finish off the stalkers so they may attack the cultists and break the spell. From the first chant, a shape takes form in the perfumed smoke above. It begins as shapeless coils and then grows more distinct as a serpent of unthinkable proportions. Only a fraction of its sinuous bulk is visible in the eddying smoke, but the sight still fills the characters with dread. Set a time limit in which the characters must stop the ritual. Uninterrupted, the rite involves the Great Serpent pouring in a vortex to fill Eurydice's body





with blasphemous life. Possible means of stopping the ritual include:

- Killing the cultists. This is the simplest and most brutal method. If over a third of the cultists perish, the magic fails. Note that simply attempting to stop them from chanting is not sufficient. Their very bodies swarm with the unholy power of Apophis, and those conduits must be closed permanently for the magic to fail. That means no fewer than 17 cultists must die if the Amenti are to prevail. The good news is that the cultists are nothing special, physically. They have no magic to protect themselves, so use statistics for ordinary mortals.

- Making a sacrifice to break the ritual. One of the Amenti must leap upon Eurydice and take the searing evil of Apophis into himself. The Balance residing in the Amenti's core prevents Apophis from taking form inside him, but the awesome power annihilates the character.

- Killing Eurydice. Considering her astounding resilience, characters may be hard-pressed to injure the Chosen of Apophis, let alone slay her. Of course, any character who jumps on the revenant to stick a blade in her chest may just volunteer for heroic martyrdom (see the preceding option).

If the characters do not stop the ascension, Eurydice draws deafening breath as a living embodiment of Apophis. Her first action is likely to annihilate the characters on the spot, though she may appreciate the ironic sport of saving them for last so they can watch her end the world. In such a scenario, the characters might yet find some heroic and increasingly improbable means of stopping Eurydice, but it's considerably more likely that events end in tragedy and horror.

If the characters stop the summons, the coils of the Great Serpent unwind and twist in tangles of smoke, and then fade away. The cultists shriek in horror, retreating to the handful of tunnels at the edges of the room. Eurydice remains alone, denied her last chance at true life. Even without success, her power is vast. It takes everything the characters have to stop her, but with her destruction, victory belongs to Ma'at.

AFTERMATH

If Eurydice prevails and attains her long-sought resurrection, she buys her life at the price of the world. As the living embodiment of the Corruptor, she is as a god. Osiris himself could not hope to challenge such a being, were he to walk in flesh upon the Earth. Only the most unlikely alliance of all the greatest powers in the world could hope to stop her — and perhaps she would

THE LAST BATTLE

Decide how desperate you want the final battle to be. Can the characters die? Can the characters fail? Even in a game such as *Mummy*, where death is not necessarily a permanent end, players may resent sitting out a battle if they inadvertently botch rolls and characters die. Consider fudging the rules in the players' favor, though not necessarily to protect their characters from death. Rather, let clever players continue the fight in Duat. The Shroud is nearly shredded in this place, which means characters may be able to manifest spirits physically for a turn by making a Lifeforce roll (difficulty 6) or by spending a point of Lifeforce. Alternately, dead mummies may be able to use their Balance to oppose the cult's ritual magic. They can't stop it this way, but they can slow it down enough to buy their living allies time to find a more permanent solution.

still prevail. The rise of Apophis represents the end of human civilization at the very least, and likely the end of the world itself. There is precious little aftermath to such a story.

Ideally, Eurydice does *not* prevail. The characters thwart her resurrection and deny Apophis manifestation. The ramifications of such a victory lie with you, but a few possibilities are likely.

REDEMPTION

In the most hopeful and triumphant conclusion, Ma'at overthrows Apophis. Saatet-ta stirs and her broken body mends miraculously. Hag-like features flow into serene beauty — and the last Imkhu awakens. With her Corruption expunged, Osiris has given her a tem-akh... and forgiveness. She speaks in his voice, briefly possessed so she may deliver the gratitude of her god to those heroes who championed the path of balance.

In this outcome, Apophis chose to abandon the hydra of many fangs and eyes for a chance at singular power, losing the safety of multiplicity. The destruction of Eurydice beheads the Great Serpent and casts its helpless coils into the pit of unmaking. All the lingering minions of Corruption remain on Earth, but now the source of their power must spend ages recovering from defeat. Without leadership, some of these thralls may find redemption, though most find destruction at





the hands of the vigilant Undying. Life goes on, and the world slowly mends to achieve greater balance. On the surface, nothing changes. Most people never know how close they came to annihilation. But underneath, everything changes. It's no longer a World of Darkness, but a world on the threshold of a new dawn and new hope. The Amenti may put aside their roles as soldiers for a time to become hidden shepherds of humanity. Many stories can yet be told in such a context, all while remaining true to **Mummy**'s themes. Still, it must be remembered that this golden age is merely a reprieve. Apophis will heal and return unless the world's guardians stand guard. Evil never truly dies, however long it may be thwarted.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

In a less overwhelming victory, Apophis fails to ascend and the characters save the world — this time. The Great Serpent will return with a different head in some future age, and the Amenti must wait and be ready to oppose that rise. This aftermath posits a world without the possibility of absolute victory or even lasting victory. Hope endures and triumphs, but the shadow of despair lingers. Such an ending leaves the world more or less as it was. The cast changes, but the play stays the same. The characters know that it will not be long before another champion of Corruption arises, so they must be ever watchful for that day. Be careful not to cheapen the efforts of the dwar, however. The mummies *do* save the world. Their job simply isn't done.

PYHRRIC VICTORY

Perhaps most dramatic and final is the bittersweet ending. At what price do the characters achieve victory? Does the death of Eurydice forever sunder the Shroud so there can be no more crossing back? In such a setting, Apophis would remain forever banished to the netherworld, but so too would Osiris. Those Amenti still breathing would live out their lives in a better world, free of ghosts and demons, but when they perish they remain dead. It would mark the end of immortality and the death of resurrection. Is victory worth such a high cost? A bittersweet victory owes its power to an uprooted and slightly ambiguous setting. Everything changes, but does it change for the better? Some players may feel dissatisfied or uncomfortable with such ambiguity, preferring a clear-cut victory. Others relish the moral dilemmas raised by the hint of tragedy. Beware that win-lose endings featuring excessive change can devalue a story's finale as surely as changing nothing can. The challenge, as ever, is finding the balance.

CHARACTERS

EURYDICE, CHOSEN OF APOPHIS

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Visionary

Attributes: Strength 5 (6●/7●●●/8●●●●●), Dexterity 5 (6●●/7●●●●/8●●●●●●), Stamina 5 (6●/7●●/8●●●), Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3 (4●●/5●●●●/6●●●●●●), Perception 3, Intelligence 3 (4●●/5●●●●), Wits 4 (5●●)

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 5, Brawl 4, Computer 1, Cosmology 3 (4●●/5●●●●/6●●●●●●), Dodge 4, Drive 1, Enigmas 2, Intimidation 5, Intuition 3, Investigation 2, Leadership 3, Linguistics (English, Arabic, Ancient Egyptian) 2, Meditation 4 (5●●●), Occult 3 (4●/5●●●/6●●●●●), Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Willpower: 9 (10●●)

Willpower Pool: 15

Corruption: 7 (8●●/9●●●●/10●●●●●●)

Health Levels: 10 (+ Corruption, no wound penalties)

Powers:

Corruption: Eurydice may draw on her Corruption to resist mind control and persuasion that would distract her from her apocalyptic quest. She may also oppose the spheres of mortal magic and issue commands to beings with a Corruption rating less than her own (using the same mechanics as Forbiddance, see **Mummy**, p. 142). No commanded task may last longer than a scene to perform. Each order requires a separate command roll. Saatet-ta may also use her Corruption in this manner.

Deathsight: (see **Mummy**, p. 135)

Hekau: As one of the walking dead, Eurydice has no natural access to Hekau. Each slain Bane Mummy bestows one dot in all Egyptian Hekau upon her. She may be assumed to have any spell desired up to her current path ratings, substituting Willpower for Lifeforce costs, and using her Corruption rating in place of the standard casting roll.

Jaws of Amemait: Befitting her status as the Chosen of Apophis, Eurydice may sacrifice her minions to empower herself. Doing so requires a reflexive Corruption roll against a difficulty of the target's permanent Willpower. Success strips away one point of Corruption permanently and inflicts three health levels of aggravated damage that cannot be soaked. Each point of Corruption devoured restores one point of Eurydice's Willpower. She may use this power only once a turn and may target only beings with a Corruption rating who are in her line of sight. Damage inflicted by this power manifests as a sudden withering and desiccation of the flesh.





Physical Prowess: Eurydice gains one dot of “prowess,” plus one for each Bane Mummy slain. Each dot of prowess adds an automatic success to all Strength rolls. In addition, she may take a number of extra actions each turn up to her prowess rating at a cost of one Willpower point per extra action. Her prowess rating is also added to her soak against bashing and lethal damage. Her prowess rating alone is rolled to soak aggravated damage.

Regeneration: Eurydice may reflexively heal one level of lethal damage or two levels of bashing damage per Willpower point spent. There is no limit on the number of health levels she may heal in this fashion each turn. Regenerating aggravated damage requires her full concentration (she can perform no other actions that turn) and costs two Willpower points per level. She can heal only one level of aggravated damage each turn.

Veiled: Eurydice always causes the full effects of the Veil in mortals (**Mummy**, p. 140).

Other Notes: Certain Traits improve as Eurydice slays the Bane Mummies and devours their tainted essence, with the number of required Bane souls indicated by the number of dots “•” listed after each Trait in her profile. If Eurydice consumes all seven Bane Mummies and achieves full ascension, she becomes an undying godlike being capable of nearly any feat. In case it needs to be said, statistics cease to have any relevance at that point.

STALKERS

Eurydice knows a ritual to summon terrible beasts from the hell of her master. These malevolent *ifrit* take the form of lean, muscled humanoids with heads like a Typhonian beast — a strange mixture of donkey, jackal and anteater — and that have cold, black eyes. They communicate among themselves in rasping barks and howls like the Dja-akh at its lull. The monsters display little intelligence but great cunning, and obey their mistress without hesitation. If slain, their ephemeral bodies disintegrate into fine sand as their essence returns to the pit from whence it came. Eurydice originally summoned these monsters to slay the Bane Mummies and retrieve their tainted souls, but she happily turns them against meddlesome Amenti. Seven of these beasts attend Eurydice, and she cannot control more of them at one time than she has points in her permanent Corruption rating.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6, Charisma 0, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Intimidation 5, Stealth 4

Willpower: 6

Corruption: 4

Health Levels: -0/ -1/ -1/ -1/ -2/ -2/ -2/ -5/Dispelled
Powers:

Natural Weapons: The fierce talons of the stalkers mimic a permanent version of vampire claws (**Mummy**, p. 204). They may also bite, inflicting Strength +2 aggravated damage.

Soul Ferrying: A stalker may extend its long tongue into the wound of a dying being to suck out its soul. Doing so costs one Willpower point. Only one soul may be carried in this fashion. Eurydice relies on this power to capture and retrieve the souls of Bane Mummies.

Teleportation: The stalker dissolves into a spray of sand and reforms elsewhere. Rules mimic the ghost power of the same name (**Mummy**, p. 208), save that the stalker may always return to its mistress from anywhere in the world as long as she is in the Web of Faith. Alternately, a stalker may resort to a short-distance teleportation as a form of dodge. In this case, the beast perfectly evades one attack regardless of Initiative, but cannot take any other action that turn. The beast immediately reforms at a location within line of sight, usually directly behind the attacking character.

Veiled: Stalkers always cause the full effects of the Veil in mortals (**Mummy**, p. 140).

THE WORLD GOES WESTWARD

The Capacocha mummies of the Andes and Brazilian rainforest faced near annihilation when their homelands were invaded and colonized. The spirits of these mallki lay dormant and forgotten, save for a few survivors who hid their bodies away. The return of these spirits as Teomallki offers long-sought revenge to the ancients, but revenge on whom? The original invaders have long since perished, and their descendents have intermingled with the blood of natives to create the current population of the Capacocha homelands. And yet, while many Teomallki accept their new destiny and move on, a dangerous few fanatics use magic and other means to enact their vendetta. Ultimately, the mummies are their own worst enemies and they must resolve the past if there is to be a future.

PRELUDE: DEVASTATION

The events of this story start with a bang — literally. The city of Sao Paulo erupts into white-hot flames, killing millions and leaving millions more homeless. Although no group claims responsibility, mortal authori-





ties immediately blame terrorists, drawing worldwide scrutiny and aid. Investigations into the destruction turn up nothing: no sign of nuclear weaponry or of any conventional explosive with enough power to level a city of Sao Paolo's size. Among the supernatural, matters are quite different. The blast sends ripples of magical power throughout the continent. Ghosts of the city's slain shriek of fire raining down from a parted sky. Suspicion begets suspicion. The jaguar skinchangers blame the sorcerers who look in turn to other powers. Even the blood wizards of Brazil's vampires know the event has a mystical origin, although they can deduce nothing with their spells. Only the Capacocha know the truth: One of their own committed this atrocity.

DAY ONE

The role of the characters in this story depends on your needs and tastes. Most events assume that the group includes members of all four Teomallki dynasties, and that they act against the undying terrorist responsible for the devastation. This reaction need not be so initially, but characters of any morality soon recognize the senselessness of the massacre and the necessity of opposing those who would repeat the crime. Depending on with which dynasty the characters associate most, their roles may include any of the following.

GUARDIANS OF THE JUNGLE

The mummies claim membership or affiliation with the environmental terrorists of the Uchumallki. Consultation with superiors reveals strange silence. The elders do not boast that this was their plan or doing, but neither do they deny involvement. The characters receive orders to ignore the matter and concern themselves with other, previous assignments. Those who are not on a mission may be given a simple task, the obvious purpose of which is to keep them out of the way. They may accept their instructions for a time, but their moral sensibilities may eventually demand that they initiate their own organization. You can also play on character sympathies with the burned ghosts of children wandering from the ashes, or loved ones gone missing and presumed dead.

SERVANTS OF PEACE

The characters work as agents of an ancient Pachamallki. Their mallki patron calls them into her presence and angrily decries the slaughter. She urges the characters to investigate the tragedy and relays her certainty that one of the mallki did this. She cannot say whom, but her worry turns to the flame-touched Uchumallki. Above all, she wants to ensure that this disaster will not be repeated, and the dead are put to rest.

SERVANTS OF VENGEANCE

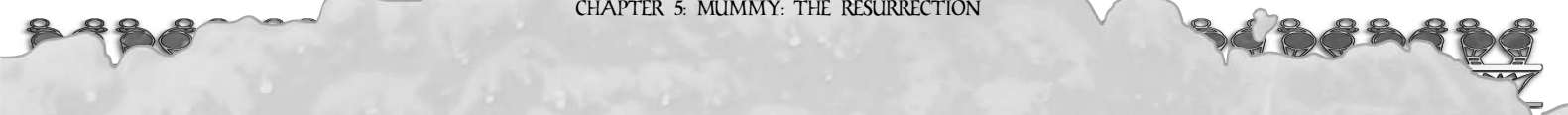
The leaders of the Intimallki look upon the devastation of Sao Paolo with a mixture of worry and envy that only widens the ideological schism plaguing the dynasty. None among them take credit for the blast, but their sorcerers know it was a Capacocha spell that "called the fire from heaven." One faction of Intimallki respects the power and daring of the responsible magician and wishes to ally with him or her, calling for a sorcerous war to retake South America and to return to the old ways. The rhetoric of the Hand of the Eclipsed Sun (*Mummy Players Guide*, p. 92) certainly dominates the sentiments of this faction.

Meanwhile, most Intimallki see nothing but recklessness and malice in the cataclysm. The world changes and no fire can burn away the passage of years. Both factions of Sun Spears wish to find the sorcerer who brought the flames, either to join with him or kill him. Intimallki characters might seek out the magician on behalf of either faction, perhaps withholding their true intent from allies of other dynasties until they find the quarry. For an added twist, the characters' superiors harbor ideas quite different from their stated agendas. Should justice-minded characters discover the murderous sorcerer and call for aid in assassinating him, they may suffer betrayal as they unwittingly give the Hand of the Eclipsed Sun a powerful weapon.

SERVANTS OF PENANCE

Both of the primary factions of Chaskimallki (*Mummy Players Guide*, pp. 90-91) react with shock and horror at the destruction. The Covenant of the Broken Circle comprises martyrs, not murderers, and they find no justification for the callous slaughter of millions. Such cataclysm releases tainted power into the magical wellsprings of the Andes, polluting their life-giving energies with the stink of soot and death. The members of the covenant sense that something even worse approaches, a doom already set in motion. Characters acting on behalf of the sect may be sent to ritually execute the responsible sorcerer with the slim hope that the gods will withdraw their doom in exchange for such a sacrifice.

In contrast to the stoic covenant, the Sun Face Gang reacts with pure outrage. A number of their immortal members perished in the blast, along with hundreds of mortal children who looked to them for protection. Even though it will be some time before most of the slain mummies can regenerate from the ashes, their spirits swiftly return to the gang's nearest stronghold in Rio de Janeiro and report on the magical fire that swallowed Sao Paolo. They want blood for blood, and grimly recognize that





anyone capable of blowing up a city with a spell can probably do it again. The entire Sun Face Gang mobilizes to make sure that doesn't happen.

Characters belonging to either Chaskimallki sect take the attack personally, whether or not they lost loved ones.

Ultimately, Teomallki of any dynasty have ample reason to investigate the disaster. If the characters have already established a friendly or at least working relationship in previous stories, they may contact one another immediately following the destruction and compare notes. Each may draw upon the information her dynasty provides, with clues and suspicion naturally falling on the Uchumallki. After all, the magic of the Smoke Dancers grants powerful mastery of flame. The destroyed city also lies firmly in their ancestral territory. As for motive, the Uchumallki recognize terrorism as a legitimate weapon in the war on encroaching civilization. However extreme, this move simply demonstrates an escalation of tactics rather than a new form of warfare. As previously stated, the Uchumallki do not confirm or deny such allegations, an ambivalence that does nothing to allay the concerns of their immortal cousins. It is entirely possible that a Uchumallki character might face anger or suspicion from other Capacocha, even within the characters' own circle.

AN ALLIANCE OF FATE

In an alternative gathering, the players' mummies do not know one another prior to the devastation. Instead, they encounter each other working among mortal



investigators, firefighters and relief workers.

Such a meeting is rife with suspicion as none among them really knows the others' true agendas. Did their elders send them specifically to investigate? Or did the conjunction of fate and chance arrange a meeting of like-minded individuals? Perhaps the gods themselves have chosen the characters to act as the hand of justice and righteousness. For an extremely dramatic opening, the characters experience the devastation personally and must resurrect among the ashes. Storytellers wishing to use this option should probably grant free dots of the Ba (Samapa) Background or require high ratings, as well as assign additional permanent Willpower or Lifeforce to permit a "free" resurrection near the beginning of the story.

Once the actual investigation begins, you can offer clues appropriate to the type of inquiry performed. Mortal refugees are herded into camps run by international-relief agencies, and which are guarded by the military to ward against further terrorism. Even if the characters infiltrate such a camp and speak with witnesses, the supernatural nature of the fire has seared their minds with the power of the Veil. Credible stories contradict one another dramatically. Never mind the wild and maddened accounts others tell. At best, the characters learn that clouds spread over the city and parted to reveal a descending pillar of flame that washed over the streets. Buildings charred, and melted concrete ran like lava. People in the open burst to ash where they stood. Only



those behind sheltered walls survived, but they were soon forced to flee as even these shelters were engulfed. Many initial survivors perished when the river of sewage that bisects Sao Paulo also caught fire, turning the entire city into a smoke-filled charnel pit. Sao Paulo—a land-locked mass with cramped housing, and possessed of third-world medical and fire-fighting facilities—burned unchecked for over three days and nights. When the fires at last choked out, there was nothing but ruin.

If the characters turn their attention to the dead Realm of Pacarina, they find that Sao Paulo still burns. Much of the city has crossed over to the underworld, charred relics of buildings looming among the glowing storm of ashes that howls above. Burning, mindless shades streak like comets on soot-filled winds. The spirits flit from building to building, with blackened skeletons silhouetted against orange flames. The shades swoop upon any ghost foolish enough to walk openly on the remembered streets. Those caught by the shades catch fire and run helplessly. When the spectral fire burns away the last of victims' plasmic flesh, their smoldering bones leap to the sky and the cycle continues.

Where the winds of the spirit storm catch flames, great blazes erupt and carve swaths of destruction. The crater of Sao Paulo becomes its own hell, and the dead cannot escape the fire that has already consumed them. They can only huddle in cellars and ruins and pray that the nightmare will end. Mummies between lives (or with access to appropriate magic) can rescue the dead and try to interview those pulled from the blast zone. Stories told mirror those of the living, albeit with slightly more consistency and coherence. After all, the dead suffer no Veil except that of their own horror.

If nothing else, there can be no doubting the supernatural origin of the fire. Characters with at a combined five dots between Occult and Alitu recognize the destruction as a product of an Alitu ritual. An Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 7 for Uchumallki, 9 for others). that garners four or more successes allows a character to identify the specific ritual as the dreaded Urcuchillay (**Mummy Players Guide**, p. 121).

EMBER SHADES

These nearly mindless horrors roam the underworld around the Sao Paulo crater. Use the various ghost templates on p. 208 of **Mummy** to represent these monsters, save that all have 1 Intelligence, and the Combustion power. It costs no Willpower for these ghosts to set other phantasms aflame, and they regain at least one Willpower point for setting new blazes. Ember shades can fly at the

cost of one Willpower point per scene, and continue to do so even at the cost of burning themselves out. Any ghost (but not mummy) destroyed by the fires of an ember shade arises as another of the horrors.

DAY TWO

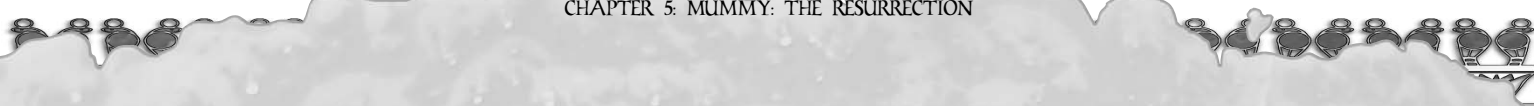
In the wake of the characters' investigation, there can be no remaining doubt: Sao Paulo fell to the sorcery of a powerful Smoke Dancer (or, at the very least, to one who has mastered Uchumallki magic). What the characters do not know is who, why or whether they intend to strike again. The answers most likely lie west and north in the heart of the rainforest and the strongholds of the Uchumallki. A character of that dynasty may be able to pull favors (or rank) to allow other Capacocha into secret warrens or weapon caches. Confusion, excitement and fear predominate among the Uchumallki cells that the characters encounter. They swear they had nothing to do with the blast, but most show frighteningly little sympathy for the dead. Indeed, they half-reluctantly admit they believe one of their own destroyed Sao Paulo as a warning.

Even as the characters work deeper into the jungle, they receive news by radio, satellite phone or some other means. The president of Brazil has received a letter claiming responsibility for the cataclysm. The message is simple: "The jungle will no longer accept the fire of the cities. Ashes will pay for ashes. Leave the forest or Rio de Janeiro burns." Having already declared a state of emergency in the wake of Sao Paulo, the government now declares martial law.

Residents of Rio respond to the threat with a mass exodus, taking boats, airplanes or cars, or simply walking to get as far from their city as possible. Riots lead to large numbers of casualties until the military restores order, but

WHAT IF THEY WON'T GO?

In case it needs to be said, players are fickle, imaginative creatures capable of derailing the best laid plots. You can certainly point them toward answers, such as leading them into the jungle with clues and a promise of more clues, but free will means players might not cooperate. Ultimately, you can only push so far before being heavy handed. It may be necessary to relay information by other means. If the characters won't go to the jungle, perhaps the jungle comes to them in the form of an Uchumallki terrorist cell enlisting aid to hide out from mortal authorities hot on its trail.





gang violence reaches an all-time high. The characters may press on into the jungle or turn back. Wherever they go, nightfall brings a new horror. As the sun dips below the horizon, the Shroud across the entire Capacocha region blurs and thins. In places already touched by magical or spiritual power, the Shroud falls completely and links the world of the living and the dead. Ghosts roam the streets of major cities, as solid as the living. The crater of downtown Sao Paolo bursts anew with fire, and ember shades descend upon the refugee camps near the site. Television broadcasts of the impossible supernatural events spark worldwide panic and disbelief.

Any character with the Awareness Ability senses the Shroud's sudden collapse automatically. Those with high ratings (3+) sense a terrible anger rising from somewhere below, just before the Shroud rips asunder. All Capacocha feel a geyser of Lifeforce emanate from torn wellsprings. Each instantly regains one point of Willpower and Lifeforce for every success gained on a Lifeforce roll (difficulty 6). The feeling is unlike anything the characters have ever experienced. They're filled with feelings of ancient wrath and vengeful triumph.

Unknown to the characters, the weight of death energy from the Sao Paolo massacre has seeped through the magical lines of power in the region. The taint has pooled in the Realm of Pacarina, dripping and flooding the Intimallki Pit of Names (**Mummy Players Guide**, p. 92). It has taken only a day for the energies to overflow even that deep shaft, prematurely activating the curse in the walls. The explosion shatters the Intimallki citadels clustered around the Pit of Names, and rises, piercing the Shroud. What began as a cataclysm has become Armageddon. The characters may have to fight off hostile ghosts or ward the living against the same, doing their best to survive the night.

DAY THREE

Dawn restores much of the Shroud, but gaping rents remain near the Sao Paolo crater. The threat against Rio de Janeiro remains, but is somewhat overshadowed with the

IT DID WHAT?

Cutting a hole in the Shroud was certainly not the intended purpose of the Pit of Names, but then no one but the mysterious founder of the Hand of the Eclipsed Sun really knows what the curse was actually *supposed* to do. Ultimately, the original function no longer matters. The unintended explosion of the Pit of Names has created its own greater cataclysm, and now the world suffers.

mass casualties and horrors of the previous night. Even with the rationalizing effects of the Veil, the widespread incursion of the supernatural has revealed the hidden monsters of the World of Darkness. The Capacocha polarize into opposing camps. The Intimallki belonging to the Hand of the Eclipsed Sun realize that their long-sought cleansing is at hand. They join the Uchumallki terrorists responsible for the devastation of Sao Paolo, and a few fringe fanatics of the other dynasties. Arrayed against this small but powerful minority are the rest of the Capacocha, who recoil from the massacre and realize that the fanatics among them will doom everyone with their mad quest.

Shortly after sunrise, a waking dream befalls the characters. They find themselves lost in a vision sent by Chaskimallki magic, in which the most venerable mallki leader of the Covenant of the Broken Circle informs them of encroaching slaughter. He begs their aid, warning that worse must come if the purists have their way. If none of the characters belong to the covenant, the sorcerer gives a brief overview of the sect's goals with one critical addendum. He reveals that the sect knows how to heal the rift and mend the Shroud altogether, provided that a rite of sacrifice is performed at the glacier where the covenant's ancient leader gave his life. The mallki concludes with a warning. By the third night, not even the greatest magic will be able to mend the rift. Life and death will join in a spreading plague until all life passes away into the Realm of Pacarina.

The world will slowly and inevitably bleed to death.

The characters must go to the city of Cuzco and help the covenant reach the ritual site safely. With that, the vision fades and the characters find themselves exactly where they were before. They have less than two days to find the covenant and lead its members to their destination or the world will end. The panicked flight to Cuzco affords many dramatic possibilities depending on the characters' location at the time of the visitation.

LEAVING THE JUNGLE

If the characters are in the rainforest, they must flee to a town large enough to boast an airfield. Alternately, the Uchumallki might have a cleared area for a helicopter to land in the jungle. Of course, if any airfield is controlled by Smoke Dancers who want the destruction to continue, the characters may have a fight on their hands — to say nothing of the challenge of kidnapping or persuading a pilot in the event that none of the characters can fly. Once they commandeer a helicopter, they must make their way to an airfield that has a jet so they can cross the Andes and arrive in time.





TO CUZCO BY AIR

Characters in an urban environment can skip ahead to the challenge of acquiring a jet. Doing so involves tense and exciting conflict as the characters must fight, bluff or somehow steal the plane (and possibly a pilot) from under the nose of the paranoid military. Soldiers certainly take a “shoot first, ask questions later” approach to anything supernatural after the horrors of the previous night. Perhaps local members of the Sun Face Gang can help, if the characters can locate them and enlist their aid. Stranger assistance may come from walking dead blown back into bodies during the daytime thickening of the Shroud. While a horde of zombies might make effective allies, such a plot contrivance may be too over the top for you.

Across the Andes, the characters land in Cuzco. While most of South America remains under military control, the city’s comparatively small population allows the characters to land without facing a wall of machine guns. Be careful to make this part of the scenario challenging, but not impossible.

Finding the Covenant of the Broken Circle isn’t too hard, especially if the vision-apparition gave directions. The characters find the anachronistic mummies holed up in a building, most likely one of the city’s many refurbished ruins. After being greeted by the figure whose dream-form appeared to them, the characters are told of an Andean glacier that the covenant has located. They now know where their revered ancient perished. Ironically, it was the explosion of energies from the tearing of the Shroud that illuminated the Lifeforce in the frozen wellspring. The dozen or so elders — including at least five mallki — must reach the top of the glacier before time runs out.

In the middle of this dire meeting, well-armed assassins from the Hand of the Eclipsed Sun burst into the chamber. The characters must dispatch the antagonists and save the fragile mallki. Fortunately, there are comparatively few killers. They had certainly not anticipated the aid (or presence) of the characters. These Intimallki flee in spirit form to gather further assassins upon their death. The characters must move quickly, gaining another means of air travel with which to transport the covenant leaders to their long-sought glacier.

Night falls with the characters still en route to their destination. Once more, the damaged Shroud peels away to unleash the dead upon the Earth. Many fires dot the landscape as the characters pass overhead. Some mark destruction, others last stands against monsters. The bleakness of the situation is impressed upon the characters: Everything depends on them.

Indeed, everything depends on a bunch of old men and women dying in the right place at the right time.

DAY FOUR

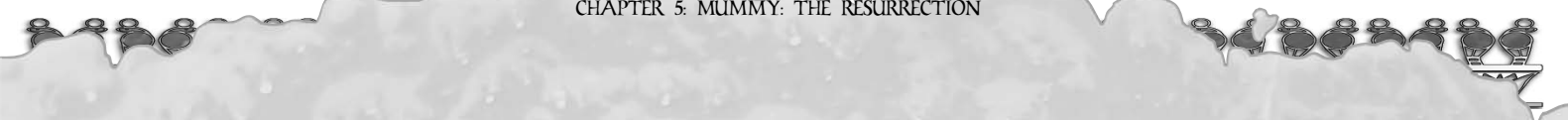
Sunrise breaks beautifully over the cold crags of the Andes. The characters cannot reach their destination by air due to the buffeting winds, not even with helicopters. They must land and hike the rest of the way. You may impose any challenges or hazards appropriate to such a climb, from scaling slippery ice to perilous cliffs to the omnipresent danger of thinning air (*Mummy*, p. 218). But more dangerous than any natural hazards, the characters must contend with pursuit. Enemies follow close on their tracks, occasionally visible through snow and glare, too far to make out clearly and too close for comfort.

The characters arrive at the glacier summit by mid-afternoon. They have slightly less than an hour’s lead on their pursuers, providing an opportunity to set an ambush (or perhaps triggering an avalanche) while the venerable Chaskimallki begin their magic. The pursuers arrive in due time — more Intimallki accompanied by armed mortal lackeys. They are led by the Uchumallki elder responsible for the Sao Paolo massacre. Despite his mallki status, he has not fully recovered from his previous ritual and has only lesser magic to deploy against the characters and the venerable Chaskimallki. A well-planned ambush should catch the pursuers completely by surprise, rewarding player ingenuity. The actual power and danger posed by the aggressors depends on your needs and desires, but should probably exceed the power of the characters. It is entirely reasonable that one or more characters may perish in this final confrontation, should they prove incautious or unlucky.

Assuming the characters succeed in repelling the attackers, the gathered covenant casts its rite as dusk approaches. The magic reaches its climax and blue flames of Lifeforce tear out of the ice to consume the mallki. They continue their chant even as flesh peels from bone and their lips crack away. Finally, the last and greatest mallki falls and the glowing bones of the circle fall into the melted chasm. Everyone in the immediate area is subjected to five dice of aggravated damage from the wash of thawed Lifeforce.

AFTERMATH

With the fate of the world hanging upon the Chaskimallki sacrifice, the characters *must* succeed. Failure is both unthinkable and irreversible. If they fail, the Shroud rating drops permanently by one point each day thereafter in an earthly blight that grows exponentially.





Soon there is no Shroud, and life conjoins with death in a world of shadows. There can be no new life in such a plane, and so the world quickly wastes away to nothing. Of course, such a resolution makes for a very bleak end to a chronicle, to say nothing of violating the spirit of hope on which **Mummy** is based.

Ideally, it never comes to the end. The ritual goes off as planned, patching the blight with the lives and magic of the martyred Covenant of the Broken Circle. But then what? The world has seen the monsters in its midst. Sure, there will be skeptics. There always are. But enough people believe that things will never be quite the same again. The world has missed destruction by the narrowest of margins, caught in the machinations of those unwilling to let go of the past. It is certainly possible to continue a chronicle with destruction averted, or even begin a new chronicle after the events of this story. You need to take into account requisite changes to the setting, though.

- **The Closed Circle:** The Covenant of the Broken Circle is no more. Whatever chance it had to complete the ritual of the ancient died with its members on the glacier. The past is fixed and there will be no more catastrophic miracles.

- **Sun Face Dawning:** The passing of the covenant leaves the Sun Face Gang as the most populous and powerful group of Chaskimallki. They play a great role in shepherding South America to greater prosperity, rebuilding in the wake of Sao Paolo's destruction.

- **The Fingerless Hand:** The Hand of the Eclipsed Sun suffers near destruction in the events of the Armageddon that almost was. Investigation of Hand citadels around the blasted Pit of Names reveals the sect's founder as a nihilistic madman who sold his soul to demons in exchange for the power to enact revenge. Without the Pit of Names and hunted by other Capacocha as corrupt immortals, Hand members decline and the sect faces true annihilation. With them dies the murderous plot of their founder. An aftermath chronicle could involve tracking down and eliminating the last cells of the Hand scattered across South America.

- **Remember Sao Paolo:** It may take a century before all the fires around the scorched crater burn out in the Realm of Pacarina. Building that necropolis into a stable city requires Herculean effort, but makes an admirable long-term goal for characters interested in a chronicle set chiefly in the spirit world.

- **With Opened Eyes:** The world has seen the supernatural, which means the Veil diminishes for years to come — maybe even permanently. Assume that a mortal's Willpower is one point higher for determining

the effects of the Veil — two dots for those in South America. Then there are the practical matters of how South American governments deal with the death toll and destruction wrought by ghosts, sorcery and monsters. How does history remember these events? How do historians rationalize them? Should mummies take this time to reveal their power and existence? How would humanity react? Truly epic stories may spring from the resolution of these and other related issues.

DAWN OF THE AGE OF SORROW

The Wheel of Ages turns and the Eye of the Demon Emperor burns red in the night sky. The Age of Sorrow comes upon the world as foretold. The Wu T'ian, the Family of Heaven, has known of the coming Sixth Age for some time. While these mummies know that there is no preventing the wheel from turning, the immortals had hoped, perhaps foolishly, that they had more time and that adherence to the Ten Heavenly Precepts might defray the effects of the Demon Emperor's rise. Now the immortals of the Middle Kingdom have run out of time.

The Sixth Age dawns.

THE FIRST SIGNS

You may want to give players indication that something is amiss before announcing the imminent arrival of the Sixth Age. Many events in the World of Darkness have led up to this, but as the time of the Demon Age draws near, the signs become more common and clear until there's no mistaking what's happening. Feel free to incorporate some or all of the following into your **Mummy** chronicle for Wu T'ian characters to notice and wonder at.

UNREST IN THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

The rising power of Yomi has effects on the Middle Kingdom and the mortals living there. Wu T'ian may notice increasing social, political and economic unrest. At first, these events are merely extensions of the troubles that already plague the nations of Asia. Political protests, terrorist incidents and various sorts of scandals involving corruption within business and government become more common. Some Wu T'ian may see supernatural influences at work behind these events, although that is not necessarily the case for the most part. Yet, there is a feeling of paranoia and impending disaster.

As time passes, events in the Middle Kingdom become more and more serious. Political protests turn into uprisings and coups, either displacing existing governments or being put down brutally by the military. Terrorists strike





larger and more prominent targets, going from bombing a plane or building to releasing nerve gas throughout a mall or subway, poisoning an entire city's water supply or destroying a vital communications or power system. Scandals and corruption run rampant, destroying confidence in the authorities, all of whom seem to scramble to protect their own interests.

These developments erode the hope that the Wu T'ian have of a better world, as they see events spiraling out of control. Many immortals may wonder if there is hope for humanity at all.

NEW THINGS IN HEAVEN

There is one reason to hope, but it is also cause for concern. As the Sixth Age arrives, Wu T'ian may find more and more mortals joining the ranks of the Family of Heaven. Odds are that the characters are relatively young immortals themselves, and there has been an increase in the number of Wu T'ian in recent years (just as there has been with the creation of the Amenti and the number of Teomalki active in the world). Awareness of the supernatural is on the rise in the Middle Kingdom, and more mortals have come upon the means of attaining immortality.

While this phenomenon offers hope for the potential of humanity, some Wu T'ian are concerned that there seems to be an urgency to the training of these new immortals. The slow and sedate pace that the Eight Immortals once followed in preparing Dragon Children has been set aside. Many Xian Lung are assigned to work alongside their elders immediately, and study as they go. No matter how many Wu T'ian there are, it never seems to be enough to keep up with the growing demands of the Middle Kingdom.

Wu T'ian might also notice an increasing concern among the Celestial Immortals. While they never show anything outwardly, there is more tension in the Family of Heaven and in the duties that the Eight Immortals assign. It should become clear to characters that all is not well in Heaven or on Earth.

POISON CHI

Chi influences life and life influences the flow of Chi. As events in the Middle Kingdom become increasingly terrible, so are the flows of Chi — the dragon lines and dragon nests — disturbed. Everything from terrorist violence to poor urban planning seems to lead to bad *feng shui*. These inauspicious events and decisions create “poison arrows” of Chi and pollute dragon lines, while also causing Chi blockages, cutting off regions from the vital life force needed to sustain hope and vitality.

Wu T'ian can experience these disturbances in a number of ways. The characters are increasingly assigned tasks to help restore the proper flow. Immortals may be told to stop a particular construction project, prevent a riot, create peace between warring factions, clean up toxic spills or otherwise act to protect the balance of forces. They also recognize that their efforts are like trying to empty a well with a spoon. The little changes that they make aren't enough to prevent the ongoing corruption of the world's Chi.

The tainting of dragon lines may affect how the Wu T'ian regain Lifeforce, as well. At first, the Children of Heaven discover that they cannot attain the Blessing of Heaven while standing upon lesser dragon lines. The Lifeforce within has grown too corrupt. Indeed, they may absorb some of this corrupt Chi, only to vomit it forth when its poison interacts with the heavenly balance of their bodies. As time passes, the Wu T'ian are unable to gain the Blessing of Heaven from greater dragon lines, and then dragon nests. Finally, there is no pure Chi to be gained anywhere in the Middle Kingdom. Only at the Gate of Heaven can the Wu T'ian refresh their Lifeforce.

To the Wu T'ian, it's as if the world rejects them, grown too tainted to stand the purity of the immortals, no longer able to provide them with air fit to breathe.

HELL RISES

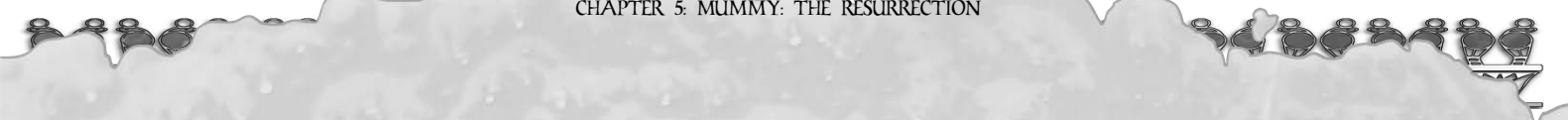
As the Age of Sorrow dawns, the power of Yomi rises as one of the Yama Kings prepares to claim the title of Demon Emperor. The poisoning of the world's Chi and the unrest in the Middle Kingdom are but two symptoms of hell's growing influence.

Demon hunters of the Celestial Arrows may encounter more incursions of *bakamono* and other hell-spawned creatures in the Middle Kingdom. Wu T'ian may also trace the work of a serial killer or drug lord to a direct servant of the Yama Kings. Indeed, the Lords of Yomi Wan turn out to be the force behind more and more events in the world.

Of far greater concern, however, are rumors regarding the Wu Kuei, the so-called Family of Demons. The truth is that the Wu Kuei exists and its numbers increase. Wu T'ian may encounter the Family of Hell while performing their duties. Bringing the discovery before the Eight Immortals proves them gravely concerned but unwilling to discuss the matter. Confirmation of the Wu Kuei's existence is a sure sign of the coming of the Sixth Age.

THE THIRD INCARNATION

You may wish to close your Wu T'ian chronicle with some or all of the characters attaining the Third Incar-





nation of the Heavenly People, mentioned on p. 78 of the **Mummy Players Guide** and detailed in the “Game Information” section of this chapter. In essence, the Third Incarnation is a balance between the opposites of Yin and Yang, a greater state of enlightenment for the Wu T’ian. The characters’ achievement of this state can be a sign of both the changes afoot and the new responsibilities the Wu T’ian have as enlightened beings.

The “Game Information” section outlines the requirements that characters must fulfill to attain the Third Incarnation. You may wish to fudge things to ensure that all characters attain this height at the same time, perhaps following a particularly harrowing or insightful story. You can either “shave” experience off awards in preceding stories (setting those points aside rather than awarding them directly to players), or you can simply waive the advancement’s experience cost and do the same with the standard Quest roll. The achievement shouldn’t necessarily feel like a “freebie” to players, but if you’re ending the chronicle anyway, don’t be overly concerned with making sure every player pays the necessary costs.

THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN

Confirmation of the Sixth Age comes to the Wu T’ian in the form of a mandate from ascended Celestial Immortals of Heaven. When characters (individually or collectively) return to the Gate of Heaven to receive their next task, they are called before the Eight Immortals for an announcement of ominous importance.

AT HEAVEN’S GATE

The Eight Immortals gravely inform the *wu* that the time of the Sixth Age has come. The Demon Emperor will assume his place upon the Jade Throne and the forces of Yomi will hold sway over Creation. It is the duty of the Family of Heaven to bear witness to this passing of the ages and to carry out certain duties to prepare for the new age and for those yet to come. The Sixth Age must also eventually pass, the Celestial Immortals say.

The duties of the Wu T’ian at this critical time are manifold. Feel free to focus on those that best suit the characters and the overall needs of your chronicle. Tasks that the Celestial Immortals may assign include:

- **Safeguarding Knowledge:** Perhaps the most important duty of the Wu T’ian is to gather and protect knowledge, particularly that on enlightenment and the paths to reaching it. A *wu* may be tasked with gathering sacred texts or with traveling the world to learn from great teachers and gurus whose wisdom will otherwise be lost. Naturally, the immortals may face opposition from *shen* seeking knowledge for their own purposes, or

from those trying to destroy such lore as a possible threat to the Yomi lords. One or more of the Yama Kings may even dangle knowledge as a lure to bargain with the Wu T’ian and possibly corrupt them.

- **Creating Havens:** The Family of Heaven must safeguard the light of hope and truth through the darkness of the Age of Sorrow. To do so, havens and strongholds will be needed in which precious lore and artifacts can be preserved. Characters may be charged with finding or creating these fortifications, either by turning existing dragon nests into strongholds against the Yama Kings or by seeking out entirely new places under heaven where the immortals and their allies can seek shelter. Since Kuei-jin, hengeyokai and other *shen* claim nearly all dragon nests of the Middle Kingdom, the Wu T’ian may need to negotiate or use force to acquire the necessary resources. This quest may also be coupled with the remaining two.

- **Saving the Righteous:** Although the Celestial Immortals wish they could save all innocent souls from what’s to come, that cannot be done. The Wu T’ian may still have the means to safeguard a select few from among the masses of humanity — great philosophers, wise gurus, enlightened souls — so that their knowledge and wisdom can be preserved. The Wu T’ian are charged with the difficult task of not only choosing the tiny handful of people who can be saved, but of convincing them to accept aid, to leave the world they know before it is no more, and to accompany the Family of Heaven to safety.

- **Slaying the Corrupt:** The forces of heaven are resigned to the eventual victory of the Yama Kings and the forces of hell, but the Celestial Immortals do not intend to go quietly into obscurity. Nor do they allow the Yama Kings to claim the Jade Throne easily. In fact, the Eight Immortals intend to make the price of Yomi’s victory as steep as possible. Wu T’ian are assigned to hunt and destroy prominent servants of the Yama Kings as the Sixth Age dawns. The Chosen of Heaven wage war against the forces of hell like never before. This assignment is particularly well suited to Dragon Children such as the Celestial Arrows, although any Wu T’ian may be recruited as demon hunters in the final days.

ENEMIES AND ALLIES

The Wu T’ian are not the only ones who respond to the turning of the Wheel of Ages. *Shen* throughout the Middle Kingdom are also aware, to one degree or another, that the Fifth Age is coming to an end. Some oppose the goals of the Wu T’ian. Others support them. Yet more care about nothing but their own fate, which may be entangled with the Family of Heaven in some way.



• **Wu Kuei:** The foremost enemies whom Wu T'ian must face are the Wu Kuei, the Family of Demons — corrupt immortals created as servants by the Yama Kings. The Wu Kuei are charged with two tasks: frustrating the efforts of the servants of Heaven at every turn, and corrupting the Wu T'ian into the service of the Yama Kings. The abilities of the Wu Kuei are detailed in the “Game Information” section. You may want to introduce them as antagonists before the Wu T'ian are told to prepare for the end, or you may want to save the appearance of the servants as one of the clear signs that the Sixth Age has come.

• **Kuei-jin:** The Ten Thousand Demons may prove allies or enemies of the Wu T'ian, depending on the Kuei-jin and how the immortals approach each. Most Kuei-jin are certainly opposed to the Yama Kings (although their courts are riddled with corruption and *akuma* servants of Yomi). The task of slaying the corrupt can certainly target the Kuei-jin, and you can unleash the immortal warriors of Heaven against the Hungry Dead in a terrible final battle. Or the Wu T'ian may be asked to manipulate the Kuei-jin into serving as cannon fodder to delay the servants of the Yama Kings while the immortals finish their work. An alliance between the Wu T'ian and the courts of the Middle Kingdom could prove useful, if the immortals can parry the deceptions of the wily and cunning Kuei-jin, many of whom may be older than even the characters.

• **Shih:** These demon hunters seem like natural allies of the Wu T'ian, but the Shih have an entirely different purpose. While some Wu T'ian hunt and slay corrupt *shen*, their real duty is the preservation of truth and hope in the Age of Sorrow. The Shih are lone hunters who cannot see beyond their calling to destroy monsters. Wu T'ian like the Celestial Arrows might find Shih allies, but the immortals are more likely to use the doomed Shih as pawns, encouraging them to slay as many demons as possible to make the mummies' own work a bit easier.

• **Other Shen:** The Wu T'ian may have to deal with other *shen* such as the *hengyokai* of the Beast Courts as part of their duties. For example, Wu Feng of the Brotherhood of the Scarlet Lantern may have to negotiate with shapeshifters for the use of a dragon nest. Xian Lung of the White Lotus Society might be assigned the task of finding particularly worthy spirits in the Yellow Springs to bring before the Gates of Heaven at an appointed time. Most of the other *shen* of the Middle Kingdom are too involved in their own affairs to pay much heed to the doings of the Wu T'ian, unless the immortals cross their paths.

DEALS WITH DEVILS

Sooner or later, the Wu T'ian are confronted by an emissary of the Yama Kings (a Wu Kuei or *akuma* Kuei-jin) and are offered an opportunity to join the “winning” side. After all, there's no need for the characters to live out their immortal existence in suffering when they could live in comfort and luxury. Do the Wu T'ian truly want to opt for untold centuries — even millennia — of life in hell just to preserve knowledge and wisdom that only a handful can truly appreciate? Is their duty to heaven so important?

The dedication of the Wu T'ian is tested through these offers. In truth, the Yama Kings reward those who come over to their side. The existence of the Wu Kuei is indeed comfortable compared to that of the masses crushed under the heel of the Yomi lords. All the Wu T'ian have to do is abandon their duties and beliefs, and surrender their freedom to their new masters. Players should decide their characters' loyalties, and there are considerable dramatic opportunities either way.

THE OPENING GATE

When the Wu T'ian have done as much as they can, and you feel the time to end the chronicle has come, the characters are faced with one more choice. They're called back to the Gate of Heaven where all of the Family of Heaven awaits word from the Eight Immortals. The Gate of Heaven opens and the Celestial Immortals address the gathered Wu T'ian.

Soon the Demon Emperor will ascend the Jade Throne and rule the world. The Wu T'ian have the choice of passing through the gate and into heaven before that happens, or returning to the Middle Kingdom. Or they can choose to remain and guard the Gate of Heaven itself in one last effort to hold off the forces of Yomi. If they go through the gate, they leave the Wheel of Ages behind. An unknown future awaits. If they go back to the world, they must live their immortal existence in the Age of Sorrow, acting to preserve hope and wisdom until the end of the Demon Emperor's reign. If they remain at the gate, they have a chance to fight against the rise of Yomi, but they will likely die, and it will be a true death from which there is no return.

The choice is entirely up to the characters. They may wish to encourage other Wu T'ian to choose a particular way, or simply decide for themselves. The Eight Immortals likely choose to pass into heaven, but you can choose for them as you see fit for your chronicle. Once the decision is made, there is no going back. The Fifth Age has ended and the Sixth Age arrives.



FURTHER STORIES

Although "Dawn of the Age of Sorrow" may be the end of a **Mummy** chronicle involving the Wu T'ian, it can be the start of an entirely new sort of game for the Family of Heaven, depending on how things end. Consider the following possibilities.

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Wu T'ian who choose to remain in the world when the Demon Emperor takes power are trapped in a literal Hell on Earth. They're the last undying guardians of the Ten Heavenly Precepts and of the balance of the Tao. These lone immortals can fight the Demon Emperor and struggle to preserve knowledge, wisdom and truth until the Wheel of Ages turns once more. Indeed, they are needed to help bring the world out of darkness.

WARRIORS OF HEAVEN

Wu T'ian who choose to ascend to their rightful reward in may not necessarily lead a life of serene contemplation. The Demon Emperor may launch an assault upon the last outposts of the Family of Heaven in an effort to destroy those Wu T'ian (and perhaps other *shen*) who have escaped. Alternatively, the Wu T'ian may find that time moves differently beyond the Gates of Heaven. They soon return, but to a world in another age (perhaps the Seventh or First, depending on how the wheel turns). The Family of Heaven is expected to take responsibility for guiding the people of this new age.

LORDS OF YOMI

Finally, the Wu T'ian may have chosen to side with the Yama Kings, becoming Wu

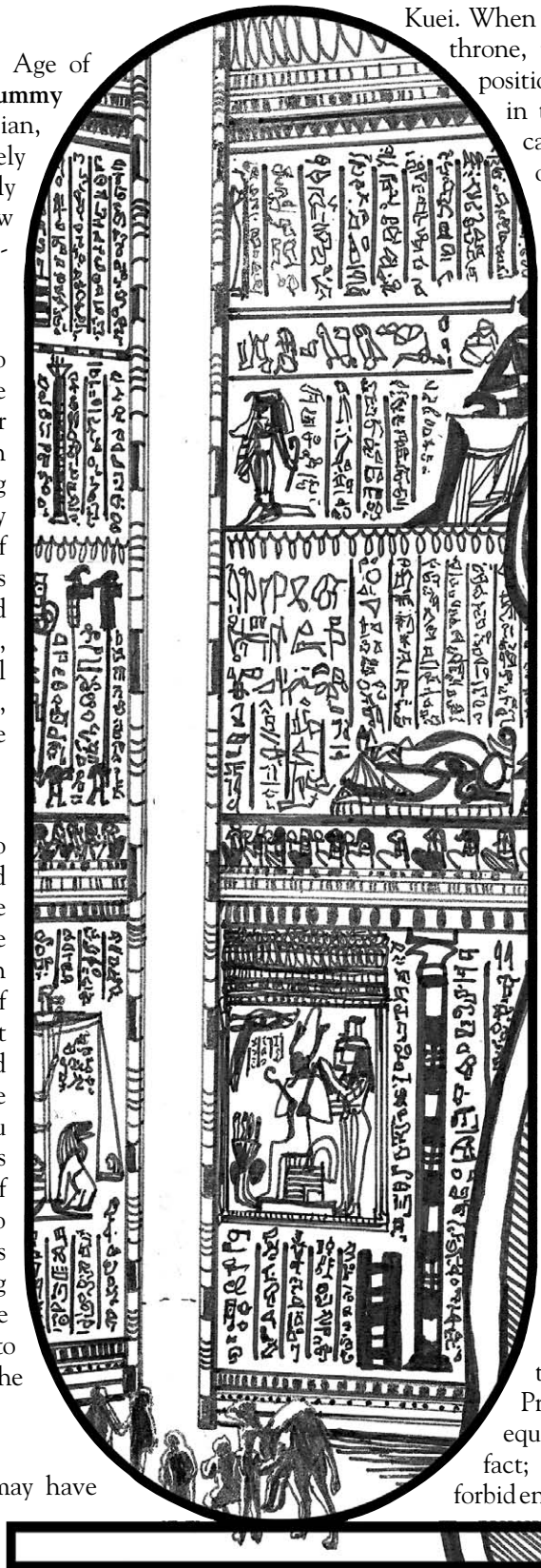
Kuei. When the Demon Emperor takes the throne, the new Wu Kuei may have positions of power and responsibility in the Infernal Bureaucracy. You can play a straightforward game of power struggles with Wu Kuei and *akuma* servants in the Age of Sorrow, or you can inject an element of loss and redemption. Perhaps fallen Wu T'ian or some of the Wu Kuei regret their choices and seek a way to regain what they've lost. Although it may take them an age, the Undying have nothing but time. There's an interesting chronicle to be had in servants of the Yama Kings becoming the seeds of a new Age. They choose to turn away from the corruption within their souls and seek redemption.

GAME INFORMATION

Storytellers can use the following information for running "Dawn of the Age of Sorrow," and for expanding the capabilities of Wu T'ian at the end of the world (or as part of a changeover to a new chronicle).

THE THIRD INCARNATION

All Wu T'ian know they can change their dynasty with time and effort, though precious few ever do. What many do not realize is that there is a middle path. Perfectly suspended between Yin and Yang, the Third Incarnation represents a taste of the spiritual perfection that awaits all immortals when they master the Ten Heavenly Precepts. Those who have found equilibrium do not advertise this fact; the Eight Immortals expressly forbid enlightened Wu T'ian from speaking of their accomplishments. They wisely recognize that



disciples cannot find their own paths when they seek to emulate others'.

System: Wu T'ian who seek equilibrium must first master at least half the Heavenly Precepts and must balance their internal Chi by raising their lowest Heavenly Art to equal their highest. They must then meditate on the condition of the soul and its growth for a time dictated by their Contemplation. At the conclusion of this reflection period, spend 10 experience points and roll Quest against a difficulty of 15, minus the character's *current* Quest rating. Willpower cannot be spent on this roll; one cannot force enlightenment. On a failure, the Wu T'ian loses nothing but the experience points and the time spent in meditation. A botch leaves the immortal so shaken and confused that he also loses a point of Contemplation. Success, however, transforms the Wu T'ian into a member of the dynasty of the Third Incarnation.

Purpose: Members of the Third Incarnation can draw freely on the purposes of the Xian Lung and Wu Feng, which includes unfettered access to Insight and Deathsight. They also consider both Feng Tan and Lung Tan as Favored Arts, and can raise Quest at a reduced experience cost of current rating x 6.

Liability: Deviation from the mandates of the Eight Immortals leads to faster deterioration for the enlightened. Such Wu T'ian lose one Lifeforce (or health level) each hour instead of each day. Additionally, the benefits of equilibrium can be lost through action or choice. If an immortal willfully indulges her Yin or Yang side to excess (Storyteller's discretion), Quest must be re-rolled at the difficulty outlined above or the character immediately converts into the Incarnation appropriate to her actions. Balanced Wu T'ian who raise either of their Heavenly Arts more than one point above the other automatically revert to the Incarnation of the increased Art without a roll.

Beyond game mechanics, immortals of the Third Incarnation are held to a high moral standard by the Eight Immortals. Higher than that expected of other Wu T'ian.

WU KUEI

The Family of Demons is made up of immortal servants of the Yama Kings. They're Wu T'ian corrupted by the forces of Yomi who have willingly sold their immortal souls in exchange for power, security and prestige.

Wu Kuei differ from Wu T'ian in that their souls descend to Yomi after consuming the alchemical formulae given to them by the Yama Kings. There they are educated by their new masters and pledge themselves to the demon lords. Then they are allowed to return to their bodies and

take up their new lives. Unlike the Kuei-jin, Wu Kuei are truly alive, not mere ghosts animating dead flesh.

Wu Kuei have the same range of Attributes, Abilities and Advantages as Wu T'ian (which is to say, largely the same as the Amenti and other Undying). Wu Kuei tend to focus on Physical and Social Attributes and Abilities. They commonly know Melee and many possess Martial Arts. Knowledge of modern weaponry varies depending on the Wu Kuei's identity and patron Yama King.

Wu Kuei return to Yomi when they are slain. They remain there until they have regained enough vital Chi and their patron is satisfied that they have learned from their mistakes (with some very pointed instruction, if need be). Otherwise, their Backgrounds operate like those of the Wu T'ian.

Wu Kuei have a Trait called Devotion that replaces Quest, a measure of their loyalty to their Yama King lords. The higher a Wu Kuei's Devotion, the greater her powers and understanding of the nature of Yomi Wan. Wu Kuei gain Devotion by performing well in the service of the kings, and lose it for transgressions against their patrons. This means Wu Kuei are fanatically loyal; their whole being is dedicated to serving their masters.

The Family of Demons studies the same Arts as the Wu T'ian, and can learn both Phoenix and Dragon Alchemy (although Wu Kuei Arts are corrupt and debased versions of their true forms). Their Feng Tan is used to inflict diseases, injury and imbalance, and is only used to heal those willing to pay the price. Their Lung Tan raises ghosts and hungry corpses to serve the Wu Kuei, and creates darkness and silence to cover their deeds.

You may also wish to give Wu Kuei the capacity to learn and use certain Demon Arts from **Kindred of the East** and the **Kindred of the East Companion**, such as Black Wind and Hellweaving. The Wu Kuei use their own Lifeforce to power their Disciplines, as with their other Arts.

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

As certain as Ra's boat descends into the Underworld at the end of each day, so is the ending of all things, even to those who might believe they are eternal. Just as the setting of the sun does not mean the end of life, only the dying of the light, so the end times do not necessarily mean the end of the world. This scenario is arguably the most subtle finale for a **Mummy** chronicle, at least in so far as the mundane world is concerned. For the Amenti (and, perhaps, Undying from other lands), it can literally mean their last days.



INTRODUCTION

In “Long Day’s Journey into Night,” the wraith Eurydice (see “Apophis Ascends,” p. 190), pursues a different plan to achieve the eternal life that she so desperately desires. Using an ancient spell fueled by her will and the rage of the Ghost Storm, Eurydice tears down the Shroud between worlds, merging the lands of the living and dead. Not only does this allow restless ghosts to return to their lost flesh, it releases many others whose bodies have long since become dust and lets them to seek other mortal hosts. In a perverse imitation of the joining of the Amenti, these shades seize mortal bodies, and not necessarily in cooperation with their current inhabitants.

Eurydice’s actions gravely upset the balance of the world, threatening a future in which the dead outnumber the living, or a world in which unliving immortals dominate and nothing ever changes. There is a means of restoring the Shroud and restoring the balance, but it is difficult and comes at a high price.

DARK OMENS

You can involve a dwar of characters in the events of this scenario in various ways. Hints and omens may arise to indicate that something unusual is happening. The material in “Signs in the Dust” provides some examples, while others are provided here. They can be incorporated in other stories that lead up to this one.

DISTURBING DREAMS

The sleep of the Undying is troubled by unsettling images. Characters may dream about walking through the Neter-kertet, seeing the Ghost Storm rage, and

DOES IT HAVE TO BE EURYDICE?

Nothing says Eurydice *has* to be the antagonist of this scenario. If you have another opponent in your chronicle who’s better suited for the role of Avatar of Apophis, feel free to substitute that cast member. Your prime mover might be one of the Apepnu, a mighty vampire or even a power-mad Amkhat cultist. Maybe the desire to tear down the Shroud comes not from a wraith’s desire to return to life but from a nihilist’s longing for death or a mortal’s wish to return a loved one to the company of the living.

As with all World of Darkness stories, do whatever you need to make this one your own, and a fitting end for your chronicle.

witnessing a tattered and torn Shroud. The fierce winds of the Dja-akh tear at the fabric of the Shroud as hungry ghosts seek to reach the living world. Characters may even make out a glowing, ghostly shape at the heart of the storm, a woman who seems to direct the force, with legions of ghosts at her back. The Shroud collapses and characters wake up.

SHADOWS OF THINGS TO COME

Mummies in the Shadowlands may notice signs of what’s to come. The Dja-akh blows in fierce gusts, and more and more restless ghosts are blown upon its winds. Others take shelter in islands of safety and calm in Neter-kertet and throughout the Web of Faith. These spirits seem to be gathering — called by some unseen source, for reasons not even they can name. Sightings of ghostly phenomena become more common. It seems that the Veil thins, allowing mortals to notice the presence of spirits in the Web of Faith. Ghost stories are mere curiosities at first, but soon grow hard to dismiss.

SIGNS

The Amenti see signs of imminent disaster more and more often. It’s written in the stars for those with knowledge of the celestial arts. Perhaps an eclipse hides the face of Ra across much of the Nile, casting a shadow in which people encounter ghosts and spirits. Urban graffiti looks like ancient Egyptian symbols. Images of jackals and other death trappings seem prominent.

THE JUDGMENT OF MA’AT

Finally, Amenti traveling to Duat and meeting the Judges of Ma’at may hear words of impending doom. The Judges whisper prophecies of a great trial soon to be faced, of the restless dead walking among the living, and of the barrier between worlds being breached.

Perhaps even more disconcerting to the Amenti is how the ever-silent Anubis, the guide and guardian of the dead, seems saddened and regards them with a mixture of pity and sympathy upon meeting them in the depths of Duat. Mummies may hear voices whispering on the winds of the Ghost Storm, perhaps saying the name “Eurydice” or repeating “Soon” over and over again. Who do they speak of and what are they waiting for?

THE TATTERED SHROUD

Events are set in motion when the wraith Eurydice uses a combination of her burning desire for life, ancient secrets wrested from the depths of the Underworld, and the blessings of Apophis to rend the fabric of the Shroud. She unleashes the forces of the lands of the dead on the lands of the living, with disastrous consequences.



THE FIRST SIGNS

As Eurydice works her will on the Shadowlands, the Ghost Storm increases in intensity and the Shroud weakens. Throughout the Lands of Faith, the Shroud rating drops by one at sunset each day. Amenti using their capabilities may notice that the Shroud offers less resistance than normal. More importantly, mortals in the Lands of Faith sense the dead. There are reports of spiritual visitations, visions and strange dreams. The Shroud has not weakened sufficiently for the two lands to touch, but in places where the Shroud rating drops as low as 1 there may be cases of possession or more active haunting, visions of a great and terrible storm, or poltergeist phenomena.

The Amenti may look into these unusual events, but they can find no reason for the increasing strength of the Dja-akh or the weakening of the Shroud. Strange happenings in places where the Shroud is weak only compound the ill omens that the Undying explore.

THE SHROUD FALLS

The following sunset, the Shroud rating drops by another point in the Lands of Faith, and that worldwide decreases by one. In a few places (those with an initial rating of 2), the Shroud collapses altogether, leaving a “hole” between the material world and Neter-khertet. The Shadowlands spill into the living lands and a number of dire effects result.

- **The Veil:** The Veil (*Mummy*, p. 140) is still in effect in places where the Shroud falls, revealing the true existence of the Shadowlands and the dead to mortals. Many people (those with Willpower ratings of 5 or less) are utterly terror-stricken, inciting panicked mobs and bouts of madness as mortals block out the terrible truth. The chaos provides ample opportunity for the restless dead to possess living hosts (see below). As supernatural creatures themselves, mummies are unaffected by the Veil, but the madness and is certain to make their efforts difficult.

- **The Restless Dead:** In places where the Shroud falls, spirits of the dead are free to interact with the living. They are still immaterial, but can use their powers freely, and ordinary folks can see them clearly. Ghosts can also attempt to possess living bodies or return to their own flesh to become risen.

When a ghost attempts to possess a living host, make a Willpower roll for the spirit with a difficulty equal to the mortal's Willpower rating. Also make a Willpower roll for the mortal with a difficulty equal to the ghost's Willpower rating. If the ghost wins, it's in control of the body and the mortal loses a point of temporary Willpower. If the mortal wins, the ghost cannot at-

tempt to possess that person for a day and loses a point of temporary Willpower. Each day a ghost possesses a body, make a new resisted Willpower roll. If the ghost wins, the mortal loses another Willpower. If the mortal wins, the ghost is ousted from the host body. If a mortal host loses all Willpower points, the ghost takes control of the body permanently.

Ghosts cannot attempt to possess Amenti, because of the immortals' unusual spiritual nature and fortitude. Nor can a spirit possess a mortal form already inhabited by another ghost.

Alternatively, ghosts can automatically re-inhabit their former bodies, reanimating them. The ghost gains physical capabilities similar to a vampire's (including the ability to soak lethal damage with Stamina), but the ghost's body is still a corpse. The spirit is not really alive. The physical condition of the corpse affects the being's appearance and physical abilities. The recently dead are more capable and lifelike than are bodies that have decomposed for days, weeks or months.

- **Sekhem:** Of greatest concern to the Amenti is the effect the fallen Shroud has on the presence of sekhem in the world. On one hand, the Amenti lose the Gift of Ra in any place where the Shroud is reduced to zero. They do not automatically regain a point of Lifeforce at sunrise each day. On the other hand, the Blessing of Osiris is enhanced. In places where the Shadowlands cross over, mummies automatically regain their Balance scores in Lifeforce every 24 hours (as if all the dice of Balance rolls were successes). Outside the Web of Faith, difficulties for regaining Lifeforce are lowered by two.

USING WRAITH AND ORPHEUS

Storytellers with access to **Wraith: The Oblivion** or **Orpheus** may wish to use information from them to supplement the capabilities of ghosts in this story. You can even run “Long Day's Journey into Night” with both mummy and wraith characters (or mortals capable of visiting the Shadowlands). Not all wraiths want to see the Shadowlands and Skinlands merged, and may ally with the Amenti to oppose Eurydice.

Storytellers using other World of Darkness games or sourcebooks should adjust the capabilities of ghosts described in this story as needed. Keep in mind that the collapse of the Shroud enhances spirits' ability to interact with the living world in various ways, and allows you the flexibility to justify unusual or unprecedented tricks.



This means Amenti in areas where the Shroud falls feel empowered by Osiris' proximity. They also feel a terrible sense of urgency. The weakening of the Shroud must be stopped, or life and death will be mixed beyond all undoing.

PLACES OF DEATH

The following are sites in the Lands of Faith where the Shroud can collapse. You can use these locales as settings for scenes, depending on where the characters are and where their interests lie. They may investigate unusual happenings at one of these places when the Shroud collapses, for example, allowing them to witness the emergence of Duat.

The Shroud loses a rating point each day at sunset, meaning that most places in the Web of Faith are completely exposed to the Shadowlands in less than a week. The entire world laid bare in a little more than a week. At that point it may be too late for the Undying to do anything but deal with the damage.

- **Giza:** The pyramids, the tombs of ancient pharaohs, are considered symbols of Ma'at by the Amenti. They also draw a considerable number of tourists each year, meaning there are many people around who may see evidence of the thinning Shroud. Having the dwar present near the pyramids when Neter-khertet breaks through, sparking a riot, can be a very effective means for impressing the urgency of the situation on the players.

- **Valley of the Kings:** By contrast to the pyramids, the Valley of the Kings is isolated enough to serve as something of a haven for the Undying. Still, the thinning of the Shroud could bring curiosity seekers, scientists, investigators and even the military, possibly threatening not only millennia of history, but some of the secret tombs of the Amenti. Mummies resting in the Valley of the Kings in preparation for a resurrection may be swept back into life prematurely by the collapse of the Shroud, giving them cause for concern.

- **Mount Sinai:** When stories circulate about the monks of St. Catherine's monastery seeing ghosts and hearing strange chanting, voices and music, the Amenti may wish to investigate. When those stories turn to storms over the peak of Mt. Sinai and possession of the monks, the agents of Ma'at may be even more inclined to visit. If nothing else, St. Catherine's is home to one of the finest collections of ancient manuscripts in the world, knowledge that may be lost if someone does not act to preserve it. The monastery is also a very atmospheric setting for encountering possessed monks and restless ghosts in search of new bodies.

THE NILE QUEEN

The ancient Shemsu-heru mummy Hatshepsut is aware of what is happening and why, and she has the means to do something about it — with the aid of the dwar. Hatshepsut gets in contact with the characters, either through conventional means such as telephone or telegram (if the characters are accessible that way), or through mystical means such as a Nomenclature ritual or a Necromantic rite that allows Hatshepsut's *ka* to visit the dwar in spirit form. Regardless of the means, Hatshepsut invokes her authority as one of the Shemsu-heru and as an elder of the Undying, bidding the dwar to attend her in Cairo. She's reluctant to discuss matters over great distance, preferring to do so in person when the dwar arrives.

REACHING CAIRO

Obstacles faced on the dwar's journey to Cairo are entirely up to you. If the characters happen to be in Cairo, matters may be as simple as a messenger delivering Hatshepsut's summons and the characters going to her home. If the characters are in another country when the message reaches them, their trip may be considerably more involved.

Consider two factors in the dwar's journey to Cairo. The first is the chaos caused by the thinning of the Shroud, which has begun by the time Hatshepsut makes contact. Cairo is likely a mess, with the authorities doing their best to maintain order. People are afflicted by spiritual visitations, and there's the possibility for encounters with possession cases and the walking dead. Travel in and out of the city (or Egypt or the Middle East, for that matter) may be restricted, forcing the dwar to find an alternate route. Of course, the longer the trip takes, the worse the situation becomes and the more urgent the characters' mission grows.

The second factor is Eurydice herself. She is supernaturally aware of Hatshepsut's divinations into her plans and intends to do something about them. The wraith dispatches one or more of her stalkers (see p. 190), either to intercept the dwar and keep it from reaching Hatshepsut, or to attack both the characters and the Shemsu-heru at Hatshepsut's home in Cairo, preventing them from interfering in her plans.

Other challenges may await too, from fierce sandstorms to fear-maddened terrorists to military patrols to simple volumes of bureaucratic red tape. The trip may comprise a significant segment of your story or may a simple scene change as the characters go from wherever they are to Hatshepsut's residence.



MEETING WITH THE PAST

Through one means or another, the dwarf arrives in Cairo and makes its way to Hatshepsut's small but opulent home. It's well protected from the havoc of the city by various wards and amulets, allowing the characters to meet with the elder Shemsu-heru in relative peace, although it's clear that matters are urgent. Attending her at all times are members of the Disciples of Anubis, her undead caretakers, who welcome the visitors graciously.

Hatshepsut dispenses with formalities, telling the characters what has happened. A powerful wraith initially chosen to be reborn as Amenti has been corrupted by Apophis and chosen as the Corruptor's champion and avatar. Using mystic secrets wrested from the depths of the Underworld, this wraith, Eurydice, is tearing down the Shroud, loosing a flood of ghosts and restless spirits. The effects of the Veil wreak havoc in the mortal world, and matters will only get worse as time goes by. In a matter of days, Eurydice will tear down the Shroud altogether. The lands of the living and dead will become as one and Apophis will triumph.

There is hope, however. Hatshepsut and the other Shemsu-heru are aware of a secret ritual, inscribed upon the walls of the Temple of Osiris in the lost city of Amenti in the depths of the Underworld. This powerful rite was always intended as a last-ditch means of preventing Apophis' victory and safeguarding the world. It requires the power of all the Reborn — those who have lived at least three lives — to use it. (Some

may conclude that Osiris created the Amenti to find and invoke this very ritual. If someone proposes such a possibility, Hatshepsut does not deny it.)

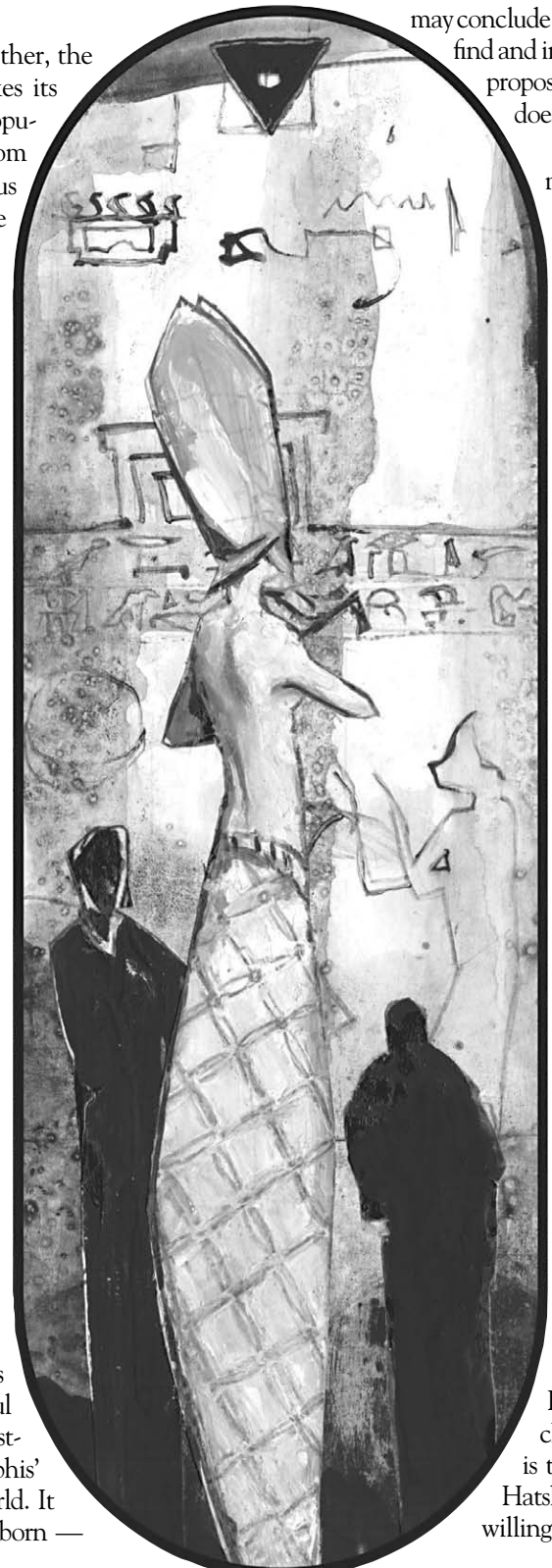
To use the ritual, the dwarf must prematurely abandon their khat to travel into Duat and reach Amenti in time. In order to make that journey, they must die.

EMBRACING DEATH

Assuming the characters accept the mission that Hatshepsut lays before them, they need to die to make the transition into Neter-khertet and to travel westward to Duat and places beyond.

The death rite can be as simple or complex as you desire. Hatshepsut has considerable knowledge of various poisons that can quickly and painlessly send the characters' bodies into the sleep of death, allowing their spirits to travel into the afterlife. Hatshepsut can also insist on a more involved ritual. Perhaps the characters must be wrapped in treated bandages and placed in ancient sarcophagi before they travel into Neter-khertet.

Alternately, Eurydice may inadvertently help the dwarf along its journey. The corrupt wraith's stalkers may attack Hatshepsut's home as the Amenti prepare to depart for the lands of the dead. The monstrous creatures can slay the mummies, including Hatshepsut, although she makes the invaders pay dearly for her life, using powerful Hekau to defend herself and the characters. The key difference here is that one of the stalkers captures Hatshepsut's soul. In fact, she may willingly sacrifice herself to allow the characters the opportunity to liberate their spirits and go





WHY US?

Some characters (and players) may wonder why Hatshepsut contacts them, out of all the Amenti, to undertake this important task.

If any of the characters ask, Hatshepsut explains that her divinations and stellar readings showed that the characters were the ones best suited for undertaking the mission. It was destined to be so, written in the heavens, no matter what the characters might believe. She points out that the dual nature of the newly made Amenti is vital (which is why the remaining Shemsu-heru cannot undertake this mission themselves). The characters have certain soul qualities that are necessary.

Of course, given the urgency of the situation, Hatshepsut isn't inclined to get into long-winded explanations, but the above may suffice. Naturally, the characters are free to refuse — no servant of Ma'at is expected to serve under duress — but Hatshepsut certainly expresses her disappointment and makes it clear that the fate of the world rests with the dwar.

into the Shadowlands. This leaves the dwar on its own, the characters fully aware of just how high the stakes are. Indeed, a millennia-old immortal has proved willing to sacrifice her existence to give them their chance.

JOURNEY WEST

Once the dwar has entered Neter-khertet, members must travel to the Pillars of the West, the entrance to Duat, the Underworld. They journey through the Shadowlands of Cairo, dealing with wandering ghosts and even noticing that some mortals are aware of them as they pass (how many mortals depends on how thin the Shroud is in any area). It should be an unsettling experience for the Amenti, although the spirits they encounter probably don't pose much of a threat. (See pp. 207-208 of *Mummy* for information on restless spirits.)

The immortals make their way past the pyramids and into the western desert, which eventually leads deeper into Neter-khertet, away from the world of the living and toward the Underworld.

THE PILLARS OF THE WEST

These landmarks mark the border between Neter-khertet and Duat. The dwar must make its way through the caverns and tunnels between the pillars to reach the Underworld.

Normally, the Judges of Ma'at pose various tests to measure a traveler's worthiness. In this case, however, the power of Apophis has grown great enough that the Corruptor uses tests as obstacles for the Amenti. The challenges faced should be manifestations of characters' deepest fears and desires virtually brought to life. Tailor the different experiences to individual characters. Apophis wants to encourage the Amenti to cling to life above all else, much like Eurydice, who values her own life above that of every other creature, and who is willing to sacrifice the whole world to escape death.

Experiences may include flashbacks from characters' previous lives, stressing how they have changed for the better (or foibles they have not yet overcome). Friends and loved ones may plead with the Undying not to leave them. And Apophis may offer tastes of the many pleasures life has to offer, coupled with the terrifying mystery of what lies beyond Duat.

ANUBIS SPEAKS

Once the dwar makes its way through the Pillars of the West, it arrives in the vast desert of Duat, which is wracked by the terrible Dja-akh. The storm's fury is greater than anything the characters have witnessed before. It howls and shrieks, the winds filled with moaning spirits. The characters are buffeted by winds and blowing sand, even in the relative shelter of the caverns.

Then they see a faint light in the distance, through the dust and clouds. A dark figure approaches. Anubis, the guide of the dead, strides through the storm carrying a glowing lantern suspended from a long pole. The jackal-headed god nods gravely to the characters, and speaks in a low voice that somehow carries clearly over the clamor of the storm.

"Has the time come?" Anubis asks.

If the characters answer in the affirmative or otherwise tell Anubis why they have traveled to Duat, he nods and asks, "Are you prepared?"

If the dwar says yes, the guide of the dead turns and leads them out into the Dja-akh. If the characters answer in the negative to either question, or ask Anubis for clarification, the jackal-god silently turns and leads them out into the storm, but does not speak to them again. He leads them to Amenti, but it is up to them to decide to stop there and find the Temple of Osiris, following Hatshepsut's instructions.

So long as the characters remain within the glow of Anubis' lantern they are protected from the effects of the Ghost Storm and the wraiths and spectres in it. If you wish, you can subject characters to another





challenge by having one or more spirits break through Anubis' protection to attack the dwarf. The jackal-god is occupied by strengthening his sphere of influence and keeping out the fury of the storm, leaving the characters to deal with any rogue spirits on their own.

THE RITE OF THE SLAIN KING

Anubis finally leads the Amenti to their namesake, the ruined city buried in the dark sands of Duat. If the characters have told Anubis their mission, he leads them through the broken and buried city streets to its single intact structure. If not, he leads them past Amenti, and it's up to the characters to choose to strike out on their own to find the temple. If they continue on with Anubis, they encounter the Judges of Ma'at, who may send them back to complete their mission before it's too late.

The Temple of Osiris is a massive sandstone building supported by giant columns. Inside it is dark and eerily silent, unaffected by the storm raging beyond. The centerpiece is a giant throne, now empty, and the walls are inscribed with Egyptian hieroglyphics. One wall behind the throne bears instructions for the rite that the dwarf seeks, and any character able to translate the symbols can read it. If none of the characters are fluent in Ancient Egyptian, they can use the Memory Background to recall enough to read it. If neither is an option, feel free to offer the characters a moment of divine inspiration, with the complete memories of their First Lives flooding back to them.

THE RITUAL

The Rite of the Slain King is by far the most powerful Hekau ritual the characters have seen. In essence, the rite weaves a new and impenetrable Shroud between the lands of the living and dead, but it requires the unique and perfected souls of beings such as the Amenti as raw materials. The rite transforms the entities into a Shroud that separates the two worlds permanently, but the Amenti are no more. They do not die, precisely, but their essence is forever bound into the Shroud. For the world to live, the immortals must die.

The rite is designed such that only the Undying can use it, but the dwarf must still decide to sacrifice not only themselves but *all of their kind* for the ritual to work. Note that the ritual does not require the consent of other Amenti. Even one mummy can attempt it and all the other Undying are affected, whether they wish to be or not.

The Rite of the Slain King is an extended ritual, using Occult + Necromancy (difficulty 8). A total of 20 successes are required, with one roll made per minute of performance. A botch resets the total successes to

zero, forcing the characters to effectively start over. There is no Lifeforce cost, since the rite is empowered by the souls of the Reborn themselves. The dwarf can cooperate in performing the ceremony or just some of the characters can enact it, perhaps leaving the others to defend them in case of opposition.

DON'T LOOK BACK

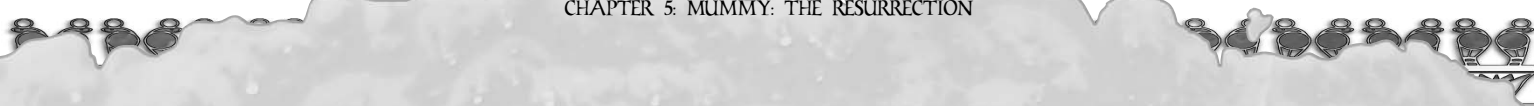
After the dwarf begins the ritual and its first successful roll is made, Eurydice enters the temple in full and terrible glory as the Avatar of Apophis. She glows with power, hovering in the midst of a swirling storm of black clouds, lightning flashing from her eyes and crackling over her skin. Her voice is like thunder as she commands the Amenti to stop what they're doing. You have a few options in this confrontation, depending on the sort of climatic scene you want to set.

Eurydice may be accompanied by one or more ghosts or stalkers. She commands them to attack the mummies, initiating a final battle in which some characters fight to hold her off while others complete the rite. Use Eurydice's game statistics on p. 189 as an example of her capabilities, making her powerful enough to pose a serious threat.

Alternatively, the power of the ceremony may prevent Eurydice from attacking the dwarf directly. All she can hope to do is convince the characters to stop of their own free will before the ritual is complete. She may use threats, logic, persuasion, seduction or any other means available to convince the Amenti. She promises them dominion over their own kingdoms, wealth and power, harems of lovers—virtually anything in order to sway them. She may also threaten to destroy people and places important to the

DO THE GODS PLAY AT DICE?

Whether or not you allow game mechanics to dictate the outcome of this story is largely a personal choice. Some troupes prefer to play things out, letting the dice (and chips) fall where they may. Others feel that the drama of scenes and the decisions of characters matter more than a few random die rolls. Certainly, it can be anti-climatic for the dwarf to come all this way only to fail spectacularly because of bad luck. And yet, temporary setbacks (the results of failed rolls) can be inspiration for entirely new challenges. In the end, it's up to you to rely on game systems or to simply pursue the most dramatic and interesting outcome for the players and chronicle.





characters, and she certainly has the means to do so, forcing the characters to decide what they're willing to sacrifice in order to succeed. So long as the dwarf remains steadfast, the Corruptor's avatar is powerless to stop them.

SEALING THE SHROUD

When the Rite of the Slain King is complete, the souls of all Reborn across the world are drawn from their khat and merged into a new and more powerful Shroud. Eurydice screams in terror and rage as the barrier forever separates the living and spirit worlds, drawing all ghosts back into the Shadowlands and preventing any from returning. The dead remain dead, and never reach the living lands again.

Of course, the Amenti are only dimly aware of such victory as their consciousness merges in a single transcendent moment. They are aware of the presence of Osiris himself, a part of the foundation of the ritual, sacrificed once more for the cause of his people. They are aware of the eldest Shemsu-heru (including Horus), and even of Ma'at herself, lending her power to this most noble of acts. For a shining moment, the Amenti are aware of the perfect balance and rightness of all things, and then they are no more.

FURTHER STORIES

The end of "Long Day's Journey into Night" is generally a final one for the Reborn, meaning that opportunities to run further **Mummy** stories or chronicles set in the World of Darkness are few to none. Depending on the events of this story, however, there may still be opportunities for further adventures.

- **Deadworld:** Most opportunities for stories arise if the characters fail to use the Rite of the Slain King to shore up the decaying Shroud. The Amenti may choose not to use the rite, or they may simply not discover it in time. The Undying still exist, but the world they swore to save has become a hellish mix of the living and dead as the Shadowlands spread and restless ghosts take on new host bodies to live again. The Undying are the only remaining champions of life.

- **Final Resurrection:** Perhaps some or all of the Reborn are spared the effects of becoming part of the new Shroud, but not without repercussions. They are restored to their physical bodies and returned to life once more, but they are no longer immortal. The power of the Rite of the Slain King — and perhaps other apocalyptic events — has largely ended the influence of the supernatural in the world. Now the former Undying are ordinary mortals again, albeit ordinary mortals with the memories of two different lifetimes and a greatly changed perspective on life and death. Are the Amenti willing

to adhere to the oaths they once swore now that they are no longer Undying?

- **Journey to the West:** The dwarf finds itself in Neterkhert following the Rite of the Slain King, apparently still in spirit form, but now permanently cut off from the world of the living by the very Shroud they helped create. Their existence as Undying servants of Ma'at is over, but a new existence awaits. The dwarf must travel to the west and into the depths of the Underworld, beyond even the Blessed Fields of A'aru to find a true reward in existence beyond death. You can make this journey of discovery into an extended chronicle of its own (using resources such as **The Infinite Tapestry for Mage: The Ascension**). At journey's end, the characters may find oblivion, eternal paradise or perhaps the way back to the living world to reincarnate and begin the cycle of existence all over again.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The following characters are pivotal to the events of this scenario. Feel free to modify them to suit the events of your chronicle, or even substitute other beings from your game.

EURYDICE

This corrupt wraith is described in more detail in "Apophis Ascends" (p. 182). Eurydice is still the Avatar of Apophis here. Rather than a risen embodiment of death and corruption, she is still a wraith, but with a terrible hunger for life. She is empowered by Apophis and her own khaibit to tear down the Shroud, to merge the lands of the living and dead into one. Only then will she attain the resurrection that she seeks, and will she reign over the two worlds in the name of the Corruptor.

Eurydice's Traits are essentially the same as those given earlier, except that she is not embodied in this scenario and exists as a spirit in Duat (albeit one with the power of Apophis at her command). Eurydice is completely and utterly mad. She doesn't care for anyone or anything and gladly sacrifices the world if that's what it takes to regain her grip on life.

HATSHEPSUT

Hatshepsut understands the meaning of sacrifice. She is one of the Shemsu-heru, the original mummies created by the Spell of Life, and an ally of Horus himself. More importantly, the Nile Queen has served as one of the greatest champions against the machinations of Apophis, although few actually know it. Hatshepsut was the subject of a mighty enchantment known as the Rite of the Sun King, which made her a barrier in the Shadowlands against Apophis' full power, keeping the Corruptor at bay so that



he was forced to operate through agents. Hatshepsut was aided and supported by the Disciples of Anubis, a secret society privy to the rite and her duties (see the **Mummy Players Guide** for details).

Hatshepsut and the rite helped safeguard the world until the coming of the Dja-akh. The Ghost Storm disrupted Hatshepsut's place in Neter-khertet and forced her back into her khat, kept safe by the disciples. They assisted the queen in recovering her strength and acclimating to the world that she left behind long ago, but the Rite of the Sun King was broken and the power of Apophis was unleashed. Now the Destroyer has found an avatar and the end is near. Hatshepsut is entrusted with knowledge that may yet turn the tide, but it demands immense sacrifice. She understands martyrdom, and knows what she must ask of the dwar.

Hatshepsut's role in this scenario is that of a guide and ally of the Amenti; her Traits are largely irrelevant. She is an elder and powerful Shemsu-heru. Assume that she has extensive knowledge of ancient lore and powerful Hekau, but is still limited when it comes to dealing with the modern world. Feel free to give Hatshepsut whatever capabilities she needs to contend with the situations of this scenario, and to move events along.

STORYTELLING ARMAGEDDON

At its heart, **Mummy** focuses on rebirth and redemption. The game's immortal protagonists have no fear of death — indeed, no *reason* to fear death. Divine grace places them beyond mortality and time. How, then, is it possible to reconcile this enduring hope against a backdrop of imminent Armageddon? The preceding scenarios present four ways to end the world, addressing all three major cultures of mummies. The stories provide a framework to end the world — or perhaps to save it from annihilation. You may run these scenarios as printed, borrow select elements or even create your own cataclysmic stories. The following section is a toolkit for incorporating world destruction into your chronicle.

SETTING THE STAGE

Most apocalyptic stories involve a measure of foreshadowing. The degree of premonition necessarily depends on the tastes of the troupe. Has fate or destiny played a role in the chronicle previously, or does the end approach veiled in unusual signs and portents? Is the world supposed to end? Is Armageddon inevitable, so it's anticipated and looked for? These are questions to consider when deciding the signs appropriate to your story.

EXTERNAL SIGNS

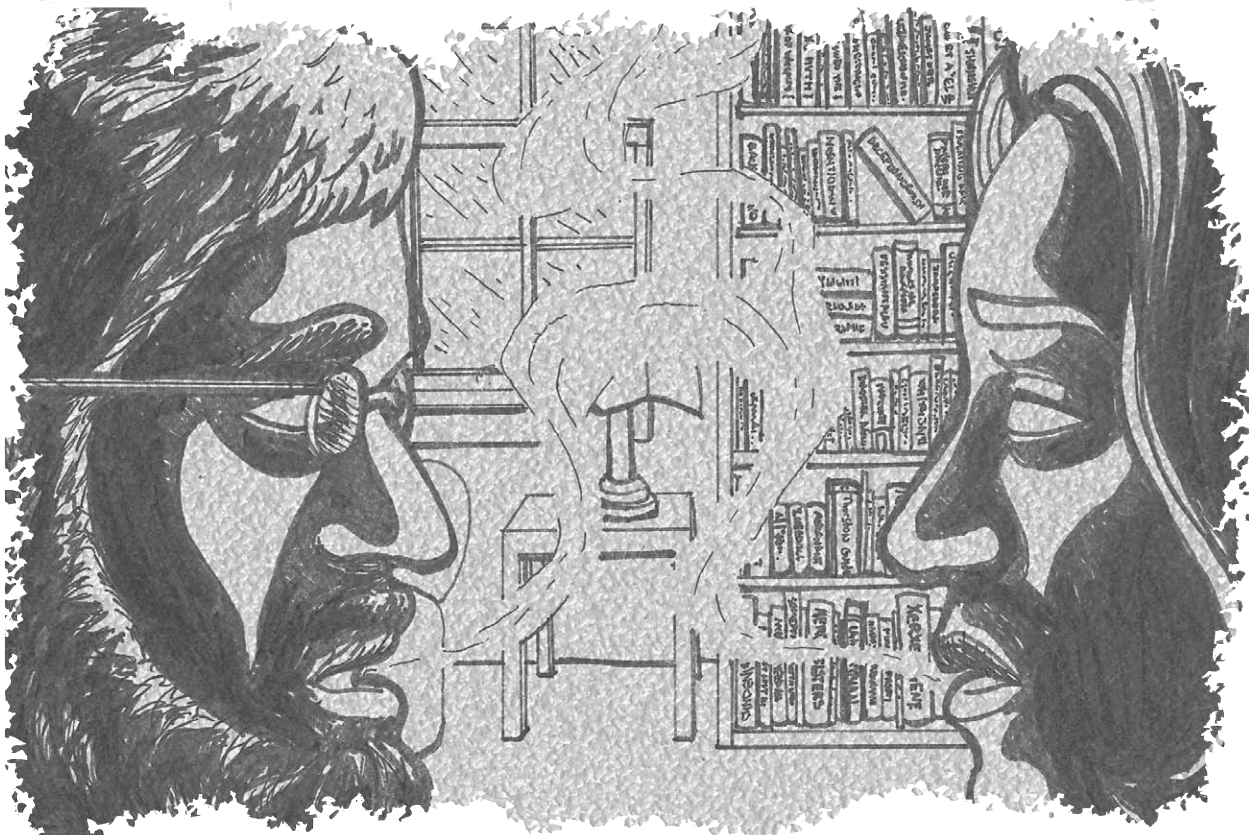
These are the “traditional” portents associated with Armageddon. Some are presented at the beginning of this chapter to set the tone for the end. Psychics and dreamers worldwide may experience common nightmares hinting at future events. Petty monsters can go to ground or flee cities like rats from a sinking ship. Ancient evils can arise from dusty tombs or return from banishment in the spirit world, marking the failure of all bonds in the last days. The tide of demons in the world (see below) suggests that something climactic approaches, but the nature of such a looming event can be obscure. In games rich in symbolism, allow omens and even miracles to presage Armageddon. If a body of water turns to blood and flesh-eating beetles rise from the ground, surely a mummy has cast the Plague of Ma'at ritual, right? But what if the characters investigate and conclusively determine that no mummy was responsible? What then? What does it mean? Questions arise from questions, and thus signs set the mood.

While deploying signs and portents, do not underestimate the power of prophecy. The **Mummy** rulebook lists Divination as a Skill (p. 61) and includes more powerful magic to determine fate as part of Celestial Hekau. Enterprising Storytellers can spoon feed bits of prophecy to characters through omens. In fact, with player cooperation and pre-planning, two characters in the dwar with dots of Divination can suddenly lock gazes in a trance and speak words of prophecy together (with players reading from a script). If the Shroud drops or rises over the course of the story, characters may spot ghosts out of the corner of their eye or discover that they can no longer look into the other world with magic. Events like this can startle players and go a long way to setting a creepy tone. As a final bit of advice, start small and work up to boiling seas and hurricanes of blood and ash. In this way, the story rises gradually from the mundane to the epic.

INTERNAL SIGNS

While less flashy than external signs, internal changes have the potential to evoke greater emotional involvement than any unexplained miracle. By their very existence, the Reborn undergo rebirth in defiance of death. Ultimately, one force and one destiny must prevail: Balance and life, or Corruption and death. Even before those forces face off directly, the metaphysical strain of that conflict affects facets of Undying existence.

- **Degeneration:** As the world spirals ever further from balance, the scions of righteousness find their own enlightenment challenged. Mummies who violate the hierarchy of sins for their Morality rating (Balance or



Direction), or who disregard mastered tenets of Quest in the case of Wu T'ian hear whispers of Corruption. In game terms, the player of a sinful mummy must roll Morality against a difficulty of the Trait's own rating. Success allows a character to recognize his mistake and retain enlightenment. Failure removes a dot of Morality. A botch on this degeneration roll removes a dot of Morality and drains a point of each of temporary Lifeforce and Willpower. Mummies who sink to zero Morality lose their resurrection and crumble to ash unless they adopt Corruption (*Mummy*, p. 143).

- **Heroes against the Darkness:** Even as the unrighteous descend into monstrous depravity, those who dare walk the path of Balance thrive under the pressure of desperation. The world needs heroes in its darkest hour, and the Reborn must rise to meet that need. In game terms, the experience cost to increase Morality decreases to current rating x 6. More importantly, the divine patrons of the Reborn reward their most loyal champions with grace befitting their greatness. Whenever a mummy performs an act that truly exemplifies the principles of her Morality, her player may roll Morality against a difficulty of the Trait's rating. Each success grants one additional experience point. Experience gained in this fashion may be spent on improving Morality or

recovering dots of Traits diminished by resurrection (that is, Lifeforce, Willpower or Attributes). Characters do not need training time to recover diminished Traits. The Storyteller remains the final arbiter of whether a particular action warrants such a reward.

- **Portentous Memories:** If the approaching cataclysm owes its origins to events and plots enacted in the ancient past, mummies with the Memory Background may experience flashbacks from their tem-akh or illi. These visions may provide cryptic insight into current or future events. You can use the rules for the Déjà Vu Merit (*Mummy Players Guide*, p. 114) to resolve unbidden memories. Daring Storytellers may even run an entire First Life story as a "memory," the events of which somehow foreshadow the end of the world. For example, the scenario "Apophis Ascends" assumes that the revenant Eurydice becomes the ultimate vessel of the Corrupter's will. Characters playing out this story might remember a scene from ages past when an oracle brazenly told children of the vampire-god Set that another would replace their progenitor as the Chosen of Apophis. The vampires accused the prophet of blasphemy and slew him. Such a memory or vignette raises more questions than it answers. Did the oracle speak truth? Who will replace Set? Has the transfer already happened?



Even a game featuring the Wu T'ian can benefit from flashbacks, although such memories are quite different from those of Amenti and Capacocha cousins. The jing shen provides power, not identity, so the memories of celestial spirits throw back to the glory and tragedy of previous Ages. Wu T'ian may dream of the exalted Wan Xian and their fall from grace. Perhaps the Demon Emperor began plotting his ascent long ago and the plan reaches its ordained climax only now.

A WORLD OF DARKNESS

Mummies share the World of Darkness with a host of monsters, wizards and strange creatures. Although the end of a **Mummy** chronicle should necessarily focus on the exploits of the Reborn, other creatures can have a role in that story. Indeed, you may want to run a crossover finale in which mummies fight against or alongside other supernatural beings in a last-ditch effort to save the world. Be careful of adding too many creatures to the pot, though, lest you dilute the themes integral to each creature.

Vampires: The innately antagonistic relationship between the Undying and the undead makes vampires unlikely allies, and that's before the added pressure and turmoil that Armageddon weighs on the relationship. The rise of Eurydice as successor to Set places the Followers of Set in an interesting quandary: Do they accept the obsolescence of their god and join the revenant, or war against her on the side of Ma'at out of spite? It is quite possible that the childer of Set may fight a shadow war against Eurydice long before the Amenti learn of her existence. More dramatically, prophecies circulated among the vampires claim that their ancient progenitors will awaken in the last days and slake their bloodlust on the living and undead alike. Such a plot device could keep the Imkhu and the most powerful mummies busy combating the plague of vampires, while players' characters investigate and discover the greater threat posed by Eurydice.

On an entirely different front, the Wu T'ian certainly have business with the vampires of the Middle Kingdom. Unlike their western counterparts, the Wan Kuei were once heroes and demigods serving Heaven and the August Personage of Jade. Their betrayal of divine trust and descent into petty theft of Chi led to their transformation into bloodthirsty demons. In many respects, the Wu T'ian act as replacements for the Wan Xian of old. It thus stands to reason that the Children of Heaven cross paths with their broken predecessors in the last days. Such meetings need not be hostile, as some of the Wan Kuei hold to vestiges of their celestial duties. Kuei-Jin and Wu T'ian may fight together against the forces of the Demon Emperor, directly

or perhaps with noble vampires sacrificing their existence to buy time for the Xian Lung to hide some great treasure. Other vampires oppose the will of Heaven through their own selfishness or willing slavery to the Demon Emperor. These *akuma* slaves represent the most dangerous foes an immortal could face.

Ghosts: As former ghosts themselves, the Reborn never fully escape their origins. Every death cycle brings them to the realm of the dead, either to the Duat of Amenti or to the Realm of Pacarina known to the Capacocha. Wu T'ian spend their time between lives at the Gate of Heaven, but the White Lotus Society of the Xian Lung devotes all its efforts to protecting and honoring the dead. Any cataclysm of the living world affects the dead, raising storms like the Dja-akh or creating hordes of new ghosts through mass casualties or atrocity. Indeed, the very resolution of Armageddon may lie in the spirit world, such as depicted in "Long Day's Journey into Night." Be careful to include the dead in any cataclysm, considering how and to what degree the events of the living world shape the events of the spirit world, and vice versa.

Mages: The Cult of Isis and the Children of Osiris both boast mortal wizards among their ranks. It's ultimately such magicians who cast the Spell of Life upon new Amenti, much as the amawtas cast the Spell of Going Westward upon Capacocha. Whether they call their magic Hekau, Arts or Immu, the Reborn draw on powerful sorcery that associates them with mortal magicians. During Armageddon, the Undying find great allies and enemies among the world's magi, particularly the cannibal-sorcerers of the Amkhat and the Namebreaker slaves of the Yama Kings.

Demons: Shortly before Armageddon, large numbers of demons escape their hellish prison and seek refuge in mortals with weakened souls. Such perverse spiritual rape mimics the joining of a tem-akh to a host, but most mummies rightly regard the act as an abomination. **Demon: The Fallen** assumes these demons once served the Creator as angels, but they were cast into hell as punishment for rebelling against their maker. The polytheistic cosmology of **Mummy** does not readily accommodate fallen servants of a monotheistic deity, but that doesn't mean demons can't play a role in an apocalyptic story for the Undying. Instead of Judeo-Christian demons, they may be *ifrit* in the service of Apophis — or *ifrit* fleeing the all-devouring hunger of their rising god. Mummies should rightly fear that which terrifies demons, and thus the damned make excellent heralds of the end times.



Hunters: While mummies stand boldly against the monsters of the darkness, they do not stand alone. Some mortals take up arms against the horrors in their midst, touched by some inscrutable higher power. Some of these people rise to greatness and heroism, while others descend into callous fanaticism. Thus, hunters make an excellent moral foil for the Reborn. Unlike vampires, hunters do not reflect an inverse of immortal existence. Rather, their exaggerated dedication serves to illustrate an extreme variant of mummies' purpose. In an apocalyptic story, mummies may ally with some hunters while other mortals stalk the Undying. Perhaps hunters look ahead to (or suggest) a world where mortals will be free of all supernatural beings. Do the Reborn even have a place in such a reality?

Others: Werewolves and most other shapechangers dedicate themselves wholly to the destruction of Corruption and the restoration of cosmic balance. They could make extraordinary partners for the Undying, or tragic enemies if flared tempers and misunderstanding bring the two groups to blows. The fae have their own problems at the end times, and little of substance to offer that could oppose the forces of evil. For the rest of the published "zoo" of monsters in the World of Darkness, you can use them or not as befits the needs of your game. A wave of *ifrit* could blanket the Earth if the Shroud thins and blurs, creating hordes of fomori. Or psychics and mediums could suffer traumatic dreams that prophesize the end. You get to decide how important the other World of Darkness games are at the end of your **Mummy** chronicle

TYING UP LOOSE ENDS

Armageddon makes for a natural end to any chronicle, but it also serves as an excellent opportunity to resolve dangling plot lines. Ideally, such resolution applies equally to elements of the **Mummy** setting as to elements of your troupe's own game. In the former case, the scenarios of this chapter attempt to reconcile most of the major conflicts and characters of the setting. For example, "Apophis Ascends" sees the destruction of the Apepnu at the hands of Eurydice, the new and more terrible leader of the Amkhat. Her rise as the Chosen of Apophis may be thwarted by only an unlikely alliance of Amenti and the last of the Bane Mummies. Eurydice's destruction marks the defeat of the Great Serpent. Such a plot incorporates the major elements of the game's setting, most importantly the overthrow or defection of all major adversaries.

The other three scenarios likewise aim to tie up their respective elements for the spirit world, including the Capococha and the Wu T'ian. Storytellers creating their own

scenarios whole cloth should consider how to resolve major setting characters and plot points such as the Intimalki Pit of Names, the fabled Third Incarnation and all the major factions of Amenti from the Shemsu-heru to the Ashukhi Corporation. It isn't necessary for everything to wrap up neatly, particularly if you plan to continue your chronicle in the aftermath of Armageddon. Most elements should resolve prior to or during the climax, though.

As for your chronicle's own unique story lines, the end is the time to whip out old friends and enemies. A long-running chronicle has its share of dangling plot hooks and lingering cast members. Players feel rewarded to see familiar faces among the going-away cast. If their characters saved someone's life, maybe that person returns the favor by taking an assassin's bullet. Old contacts can get antsy and pack up, warning the characters that something *bad* is coming. Old enemies can join with the ultimate evil in their own mad quest for power or vengeance, while others serve the dark powers as brazen cowards, claiming, "It's better to be the right hand of the Devil than in his path" (to quote the archetypically sleazy Beni Gabor in *The Mummy*).

Morally gray figures may cast their lot in either direction, taking a place on the side of hope or destruction as appropriate. Even longtime villains may surprise everyone by choosing life over the universal destruction of everything they know. Ends force everyone who lives to choose sides, and that isn't a bad thing. Unlikely allies make for excellent roleplaying opportunities, as do unfortunate enemies and other twists of fate.

In fact, you can interweave Armageddon into your chronicle without players fully realizing what's going on. Doing so creates and maintains the characters' emotional attachment to what's important to them while everything around them falls apart. Mummies can speak of "saving the world" and "fighting evil" abstractly, but characters still jump to save a loved one, even amid mass destruction. It's that connection to cast members and interest in subplots that helps tie up loose threads in your Armageddon game.

MOOD AND TONE

While signs and portents go a long way to setting an apocalyptic mood, go beyond such gimmicks. As more and more signs point to utter finality, players will naturally begin to worry. That's good. The tone of Armageddon is anxiety colored with hefty doses of desperation and fear. Every clue should raise more questions than it answers. Drop red herrings and misleading hints among cryptic half-truths. Make fate a puzzle and force the characters to work hard to assemble it. Each piece should heighten the ambiance





of dread, steadily quickening with every revelation until the signs come too fast to handle. Just be careful not to overwhelm the players along with the characters. For all its seriousness, an apocalyptic story is just a story. If the players don't enjoy themselves, you're not doing a good job. This is one of many reasons why cataclysm works best with a long-standing troupe and chronicle. The players have (hopefully) grown to trust you.

Another important factor in establishing tone is making it appropriate to your intended resolution. If the characters can save the world and leave it a happy, shiny place, maybe the lead up shouldn't be too dark. In contrast, a story working toward tragedy can be outright ugly in its opening stages, with bad things happening to good people as a prelude to the bad things that will befall everyone. You can even mix and match, leading players to believe there is little hope while holding the possibility for total victory close to your chest. The reverse is *not* advised, however. Players tend to resent being lured into a false sense of hope.

WITH A BANG..

The events of Armageddon do not need to be subtle. Maybe they shouldn't be. There doesn't have to be a gradual buildup toward the end. Want to blow up a major city? Or a dozen? Want to unleash the Dja-akh into the living world as an all-consuming typhoon of hungry shadows? Want vampires and walking dead to roam the streets in an orgy of blood and death? Go right ahead! Nothing is over the top for an apocalypse, so long as it doesn't feel cheesy or contrived. Move away from creepy suspicion and heighten the tension by killing off some major Storyteller characters. Make it clear that *this is it*. There are no second chances, not even for the Reborn. Unless stopped by whatever means necessary, the end really is the end of everything. No one else is going to save the world, so the characters better get moving *now*.

PLAYING GODS

Although **Mummy**'s setting involves many divine beings, these participants normally act at the periphery of a plot. The Imkhu serve as the generals of the Amenti, directly concerning themselves only with the greatest threats. A given dwar may never even meet one of the Imkhu, let alone come face to face with Horus. Osiris operates incidentally on two levels: his dismembered body is strewn across the Web of Faith while the energies of his soul suffuse that ancient network of holy sites. Even in Duat, a realm populated entirely by spirits, the gods take a detached — even passive — role. The

judges measure purity and worthiness, stripping away or awarding power as befits their will and the honor of those they measure. Anubis ferries and wards the dead, but as a silent, implacable figure with a specific task. The jackal-headed ferryman doesn't come to the rescue if the characters take a wrong turn into a nest of angry shades. And behind the rest of the pantheon, Ma'at stands as a concept and ideal of balance rather than as a tangible entity. And for its part, Apophis is quite real but still nebulous. The Great Serpent dwells coiled in the hearts of its slaves, in the hunger of vampires, Amkhat and the demon-eaten souls of the Apepnu. But Apophis itself does not appear except by proxy. Right?

Wrong. All the rules change at Armageddon. Deities can and do take an active role in events. "Apophis Ascends" deals with just that: the rise of Apophis through his chosen avatar of Eurydice. If the two join and resurrect, Apophis gains a living vessel. Nothing can stop such a horror. But then, that's the point. The characters must do the impossible and prevent this blasphemous joining or the world ends. But even before the climax, Eurydice grows into a demigod all her own. In her lies the combined powers of the Apepnu and the unholy might that Apophis once imbued in the vampire Set. Eurydice is brilliant, angry and obscenely dangerous. So how is a poor Storyteller supposed to portray her?

Playing gods isn't easy, but nor is it impossible. In the preceding example, Eurydice was once human, and enough humanity remains to portray her accordingly. Show the power. Show the ambition and arrogance commensurate with that power. But she is not omnipotent, and certainly not omniscient. The same holds true for the ascendant Demon Emperor of the Middle Kingdom, and any other evil power in the established **Mummy** setting. This rule holds true for Osiris, Anubis, the ancient mallki and the Eight Immortals. Beings that lie beyond a need for game statistics aren't necessarily perfect. You can interject foibles and vulnerabilities without the aid of numbers and dots.

Of course, the other side of this dilemma is that gods *are* powerful and well informed. Don't be afraid to fudge. The players can't see your notes or look behind the screen, so feel free to give entities whatever they need to fulfill the role you intend for them. It's not heresy to throw dice and ignore the results for dramatic purposes, (although players may be disgruntled if they know you fudge the results). Ultimately, you are the only omnipotent force in your game. You may delegate as much of that power to any cast member as you like. Just keep it fun.





...OR WITH A WHIMPER?

Admit it: City-leveling pyrotechnics are just, plain fun. The opportunity to turn the entire World of Darkness on its head in an over-the-top battle between good and evil has a certain undeniable appeal. It's dramatic. It certainly keeps players attentive with dynamic imagery and fast-paced play. But that kind of game isn't for every troupe or Storyteller. In many ways, it's far more challenging to tell a subtle Armageddon. What if the world almost ends and no one ever knows?

The tools and tricks of a subtle cataclysm differ considerably from those of the big-bang approach, but the setting affords what you need. First, there's the Veil, that nepenthe of half-mystical unbelief behind which mortals hide when faced with the supernatural. The power of the Veil is astoundingly strong, reinforced by a society accustomed to big-budget special effects and scientific explanations for everything. It's because of the Veil that the world suspects terrorism and not magic when Sao Paulo burns to ash in "The World Goes Westward." People don't want to believe there are monsters — or rather, they want to believe there are no monsters. They want to believe they're safe. Faith necessarily

blinds the masses to the existence of the hidden world, a faith preyed upon by prowling vampires, werewolves in the rural lands and mages sequestered among their unenlightened kin.

Mummies — and ambitious Storytellers — also hide behind the Veil. Allow for and encourage mortal rationalization of amazing events. Supernatural beings know the truth, or at least many do. And so the characters face the challenge of concealing their identities and the truth even as they protect the world from that truth. Such a conspiratorial style of play can draw on any number of paranoia-driven inspirations. The obvious pop-culture source is the *X-Files*. Bring the world to the brink and let the players save the day, maybe even purging the world of supernatural taint. However dramatic a resolution this is, mortals don't miss the monsters they never acknowledged or knew before. Thus the world goes on, oblivious.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Of course, what if Armageddon is *not* the end of everything as we know it? The scenarios presented in this chapter allow for numerous possible endings, some of which resolve in bittersweet triumph and others which end quite hopefully. **Mummy** allows for the pos-



sibility of resurrection more so than any other World of Darkness game. Even if the world dies, it doesn't have to stop. Spring follows winter. Day follows night. The Wu T'ian look to the inevitability of the Seventh Age and the overthrow of the Demon Emperor as surely as they anticipate the hellish darkness of the Sixth Age. Meanwhile, the Amenti don't even share this measure of fatalism. As far as they're concerned, the world doesn't have to end. It may take sacrifice and good people will die, but they believe the forces of evil can be beaten back.

A number of special challenges confront Storytellers running a post-apocalypse story. If the chronicle begins prior to the cataclysm, the end (or averted end) is the natural climax of the plot arc. Stories set afterward can feel tepid or anticlimactic. You can overcome these sentiments in one of two ways. First, set a mood of continued need. Don't allow mummies to grow complacent. The defeat of a central villain doesn't mitigate the need for rebuilding or cleaning up the spiteful traps or lackeys left behind. Second, set a mood of haunting uncertainty. Resurrection works both ways. Maybe the villain has suffered death and defeat, but will rise again unless the characters take steps to make the victory permanent. Beware cheapening the climax of your Armageddon, however. If the players feel that all the sacrifices and noble deeds were ultimately superfluous, they may resent your story.

Another possibility for a post-apocalyptic game is one that begins *after* the end. This approach allows the original chronicle to resolve with the end, and the next story picks up days, months or even years later with a new cast. Such a spin-off depends on the continuity and events of the earlier chronicle, while retaining its own focus and themes. Mummies created long enough after the cataclysm may not remember a time before nuclear winter. They may have grown up with walking dead roaming the expenses between ruined cities, preying on living stragglers. Or maybe the world is largely a better place, so survivors have never seen a vampire. In a setting irrevocably changed by the events of the apocalypse, joining with an ancient soul (or even one less ancient) allows a new mummy to recall events before the end. The new immortal has a memory of something better and the power to restore it, or a dire sense of what evils may arise again if she does not stop them.

The quest to restore civilization to its past splendor makes for an epic chronicle no matter what direc-

tion it takes. Characters may be inscrutable nomadic heroes in the vein of *Mad Max*. Or perhaps civilization is rebuilt, but the people in charge have gotten it wrong somehow. The supposed utopia might hold onto power with tyranny or social conditioning utterly contrary with the dictates of Ma'at. The antagonists of such stories are probably mortal despots. Any war against dystopia can draw on the imagery and themes of 1984, *Equilibrium* or countless other films and books. For a slight twist, rogue immortals set themselves up as god-kings throughout the world. They mean well enough at first, trying to shepherd the masses toward enlightenment. In time, however, these Undying pharaohs grow corrupt as they believe their own lies, demanding worship and obedience from their subjects. Noble mummies (i.e., the characters) must hunt down and overthrow their own so that humanity can truly rebuild without supernatural influence.

Storytellers feeling particularly philosophical can play out a reconstruction chronicle with the same mummies who fought in Armageddon. These beings perished to save the world and have been trapped in an extended death cycle by the Spirit Storm, a thickened Shroud or by some other plot contrivance. Their bodies have lain hidden or maybe they were recovered and given elaborate burials by other mummies. The world has changed dramatically in the characters' long absence. Other Reborn rule openly as god-kings as suggested, or behind the scenes as viziers. In either case, those in power pay lip service to the characters as saints in a religion venerating the elite caste of ruling immortals. The powers that be do not want to confront the inconvenient reality of their saints. They likely decry returned characters as frauds and heretics, sending minions to hunt them down and keep them from ruining the lords' clever charade. A story like this relies on a mood of desperation and haunting despair. The good guys saved the world, but for what? For this? Such a setting shows that evil never really dies, it just wears a new face.

Perhaps the characters realize they can't even trust themselves, and so must cleave the Shroud to destroy all the Reborn. No more meddling immortals or ghosts. No more supernatural powers. Let humanity have its world to do with as it pleases. This is definitely a bitter epilogue, akin to the Norse tradition in which the end marks the fall of gods and heroes as surely as the monsters they oppose.





Epilogue: Right and Wrong

Sword clashes on spear and I know the next part's going to hurt. It already hurts. Everything hurts.

Belphigor's strong — not as strong as he was before the fall, but stronger than he was when he got out of the Pit. If he tells anyone he doesn't consume his fellow fallen, he's a liar.

He's a liar whatever he tells anyone.

We lock up *corps a corps* and I shove him back, but I can't hide a wince as I do. It's my shoulder, my chest, right where my heart would be if I had one. The hole that Bright Shining pawn put in me two months ago, it's still there and it makes my left arm weak. Left wing, too.

Belphigor's got my measure now. He was holding back. I knew he was. He knew I knew and now he's going to make his move.

My spear has reach and I thrust at him, in and out, but it's heavier and he planned for that. He's the superior flyer now. He flutters up, out of reach. I stay on the ground, waiting. He's looking down at me. He must love that.

"If you're the real Morningstar," he bellows, "It will be a sevenfold honor to defeat you — to be the first ever to do so. And if you are false... that's good, too."

This gets a laugh from the assembled Faustians, who are watching from one side. The Luciferans, on the other, glower at them, but both hold back. Not many of either faction really want to go head to head, not with dukes like Vodantu getting free and Earth-bound like Abbadon openly soliciting human worship. They're willing to watch the fight... so far. Each side still hopes its champion will win.

We're fighting in the Grand Canyon. I'm at the bottom, looking up at a blue strip of sky. Belphigor's level with the land above, posturing. He folds his wings and dives like a meteor.

I get one shot at him, one stab, and he turns it aside — a perfect block. I barely feel it and then the sword's back in position, transfixing me, and then I die.

★ ★ ★

When I come back, Nazathor is sliding down the wall of the canyon, leaving a trail of blood and white feathers behind her. Another Luciferan has shown his wings and jumped off the side, too. Avenging me? No, trying to protect her. It's the Star Thorn, Nazathor's enamored aide-de-camp. He nurses dreams of saving her, earning her love, luring her from me. I wish he could.

I wish I could let Belphegor kill both of them, but that wouldn't be good politics. I can't be the devil who lets his people die. I have to show them I'm strong enough — not just strong enough to win, but to win without casualties.

But I do let Belphegor hit Star Thorn once before I stand up again.

"Is that the best you can do?"

He turns when he hears me and his expression is appropriate. Demons don't just come back like that. I do.

"I killed you!"

Predictable. "You did. And that's all?" I stride forward. He's got my spear in one hand, his sword in the other and he's trying to figure me out.

"I was never sent to Hell, Belphegor. I was never bound away from Earth. The Pit does not draw me and I cannot die. This is my *realm* and I am its Lord!"

If he bends knee, I'll get the Faustians. But he won't.

First he hurls the spear to distract me, but I catch it easily. Then he calls fire, wreathing himself in flames of near-nuclear intensity. It won't help, but he can't think of anything else to do.

He was smarter in the war.

"I remembered most of your name, Belphegor, and our wrestling match has been enough to show me your changes."

I speak and his own fire consumes him.

I'm going to get the Faustians anyhow.

"Does anyone else dispute that I am Lucifer, the Morningstar, your absolute ruler?"

No one does.

★ ★ ★

It's only later, after the fight, that I realize my chest is still wounded. There's no blood, but there's a hole clean through. It's about the diameter of a quarter. I'd wondered. Hoped it would get better if I died and resurrected. If you've read your myths, that should fix just about everything. But maybe I never really die.

Maybe I've never really lived.

Thinking about that later, in Kalamatá, I wonder. Who sent Wendell? Were they acting on the orders of the Allmaker? If so, I'm not just fighting an infernal apocalypse. I'm fighting a divine one as well.

The kiss of God has broken me. Even the pretense of joy means nothing. I didn't even realize how well I

had succeeded in ignoring my memories until Wendell brought them all back. The bitter jests, the luxuries... no more. There's no point.

No distractions, only duty. But if it's God's will that I fight, do I even have duty any longer?

There are things that do not make sense.

Malakh.

One of the beast-watchers, a bureaucrat in the universal government, but a passionate one. Malakh always had faith in me. Always trusted me, even at the very end.

The others have faith too, of course. I've felt it trickling in since the first of the fallen escaped the Pit and sacrificed in my name. Now that I've uncloaked myself, taken the reins of the Luciferans and the Faustians, the trickle has become a torrent. Rapes, murders, torture... and also epiphanies, salvations, miraculous rescues and long-shot cures, all accomplished in my name. Hundreds of demons, thousands, making mortals pray to me. Some of the fallen truly believe. They think I've come back to pick up the banner and lead them against the Most High.

Have I?

Others just hedge their bets. But all of it, all that power, all that trust... it flows through me like blood. I half expect it to leak from my shoulder.

But even amidst all that, Malakh was special — is special. At my word, he once lay down his weapons and surrendered to Hell, and that's one of my few regrets. If I could do it over, knowing what I know... what would I do? I don't know.

Malakh said God was in the Garden.

I know that's not true. I know it can't be. But Malakh. He wouldn't lie. If he lied, I would have known. He had no reason to. He could have been mistaken, of course, but how? Just who does one see and mistake him for the Source of All? It wasn't me, stopping by in the evening cool to monitor the woman and man. I knew nothing about it. No one from my house did. Nor did the wind walkers, or those who turn the spheres.

Why Malakh? Was he confused? Deliberately misled? Did he make a mistake? Is it some strange mental static from his host?

Or more dreadful to think, was he right? *Did* God Almighty come into Eden?

I know that to be impossible. The infinite cannot touch the finite. At least, that's the truth as we in the House of Dawn knew it.

But I also know God kept secrets.

Was it some subset, some limited aspect, some pared down, shed skin of Divinity? Some shard shrunk down to universal size, able to move within the world

without distorting it? If God tried to touch the world, it would have been like dropping an aircraft carrier in a bathtub and trying not to ripple the water. That's why angels were made, to rarify God's power so that it could work on a human scale.

If God could accomplish that from the beginning, why create us?

Then there's John.

John wasn't even an angel. John was a man who put a new spin on the history I told him.

John was a bright man. A scholar and a priest and the third person in history to figure out the clues from *Dies Ignis* and *Hmeres Puros*.

I told John the world trembled after the woman and the man made their choice. I told him God touched Earth and the Earth was thereby changed. And it was John who asked me this: What if that touch was not a blow, but a catch? What if God intervened, not to punish, but to protect?

If a being is infinitely good and infinitely powerful, what happens when those twin infinities are put in check? When they are matched against each other? When keeping one means losing the other?

John was a Christian, of course. He was equipped to think of God dying.

Why not Malakh's garden God? If it existed, a part of God that could move through the world as if part of it, why not save the world it? Was more required? Or was Malakh wrong? Or was John?

In the end, I killed John. Just like I killed Woodrow. Was God wrong?

I never told John — and certainly never Malakh — that I asked the angels to rebel because the Most High ordered me to do it. What would they make of that?

★ ★ ★

I brooded in Kalamatá. I stayed there, alone, as long as I could, but it wasn't long. They needed me. My army. I ordered them into the field against the Raveners, commanded them to recruit those who would come over and to consume the rest. It wasn't hard. Most Raveners were itching to die for the cause, anyway. The rest could only fight off hope for so long. I wish I could stop giving hope.

Now I'm in Los Angeles, on my throne, looking out at the line. They have come to give me gifts, hoping to rise in my favor. The Luciferans feel they are my chosen and beloved, while the Faustians scheme like jealous middle children. It will schism unless I take care. So that is what I do today, take care.

The first in line is the fiend Nebusus, Duke of Solar Wind, a proud member of the Legion of Glorious Victory. He comes before me with his radiance unbound, wings of starlight sweeping the floor as he

kneels, low enough to be ostentatious, but only by an inch.

"My lord," he says, "I bear a gift unworthy of your magnificence. It is, alas, the finest I have. But it tasted my blood when it was in the hands of your enemies, and in my hands it has tasted theirs in turn."

With a flourish, he stands and produces one of the eight Sombre Axes. A few of the witnesses are human enough to gasp.

Of all the many weapons used in the War on Heaven, the Sombre Axes were particularly feared. I've destroyed two myself, and four others have been lost or damaged until they've become terrifying merely on a human scale. But this is one of the two that remain. It is as potent as the day it first killed an angel.

I stifle a yawn and take it from his hands.

"A magic axe," I say. "I see."

I shift it in my hands, feel the balance, then swing the flat of the blade into the side of Nebusus' head. He stumbles, fights it, but has to crash to his knees.

"Just what am I supposed to do with this? Hm? Challenge great Raveners to single combat? Bear it against Earthbound whose souls can be split into a thousand shards without being reduced? Rule with it across my knees as a symbol of my great might? *What would I want with a magic axe?*"

I stand and brandish it. "Have none of you listened? *None?* This is not the old war! This is a new fight, in new realms, and it will be won with politics, persuasion and the faith of mankind, not with *enchanted trinkets!*" I fling it to the ground and it thunders. "You!" I shout, pointing to a woman far back in line. She freezes. "You! Come forth!"

She's smart enough, strong enough to show no fear. She steps forward, bringing with her a heavy steel suitcase.

"Who are you?" I ask, though I know.

"I am M'Tappi of the Slayers," she says.

"What faction did you serve?" I know this as well.

"I was a Faustian."

"Was. A Faustian. And what have you for me?" Once more, I know.

"Enriched uranium stolen from a breeder reactor."

I smile.

"This one understands," I tell them. I glance at Nazathor and say, "Take this to our Malefactors. See what they can build me."

She nods.

★ ★ ★

I do not envy often or easily, but I envy Ouestucati.

I didn't need to send out a squad to seize her by force, though I would have. Maybe I wanted to. But all

I had to do was ask. I spoke her name and she was on the next flight to Washington D.C. (which is where I'm conducting the business of the moment).

Her host body is named Valla Brettlinger, and she is lovely. I don't think she was lovely before being possessed, and I don't think Ouestucati has tinkered with her on any level. I think that the spirit of Ouestucati is very close to being the angel it was, and that would show through in the body of a toad or a cockroach.

"You've been busy," she says. Before, I would have sardonically said 'You have no idea,' but now I just nod.

"The world needs me," I tell her.

"Does it?"

"Who else? The hammer is falling. This is it. I've finally marshaled half of the fallen into some kind of coherent fighting force, and it's still a challenge to get close victories over the *lesser* Earthbound."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Are you? So where are your followers? Where are the Reconcilers?"

"I'm not sure fighting will do any good."

"You're willing to leave this world to Dagon and Belial then? Or have it be the battlefield between them and the princes as they emerge, one by one, from the Abyss?"

"You and your army will save the world then?"

I glare, trying to see if she's going to bring up my failure the last time I tried. But that time was different, and she doesn't know. That time I was God's stooge. This time I'm on my own and I'm going to fight on my terms.

"If not us...?"

"You're making two big assumptions," she says. So calm! As if defying me is nothing to her. Yet she isn't pushy, she isn't sarcastic. She's honestly trying to help me. "First, you're assuming that unless you save the world, no one else will."

"And who do you think might?"

"Humanity?"

I sigh.

Before Wendell, I would have laughed.

Before Woodrow, I would have agreed with her.

"They had their chance," I say. "They can't. I followed their finest, their strongest, led them by the hand... and each disappointed me in turn. None of them could do it. None could lead. Now it's too late."

"Maybe they could have done it without you. Maybe they still can."

"They *failed*!" I'm surprised to find myself standing, shouting, pounding my desk. "They did their best and *failed*! Like they failed us in the war! Like they failed the

world after we were locked away! Like they failed God's test in Eden. Like they've failed every test!"

"Every test?"

I sit again.

"We can't take the chance that they'll fail this time."

"I would say we must."

"We should do *nothing*?"

"Perhaps all this would have been avoided if we'd had that much patience and wisdom the first time."

"But I can win this for them!"

"If it's *you*, exactly how have *they* won?"

"They win by having a world! A world that's theirs instead of one they have to share with us, and with the Bright Shiners, and with all the other parasites."

"If you give it to them instead of letting them win it, how is it really theirs?"

I stand again and this time I come around the desk. I'm fed up.

"Maybe there isn't a happy ending, Ouestucati. Did you ever for a minute think of that? Maybe God is more just than merciful. Or maybe She's just dead, dead from being more merciful than powerful."

Ouestucati doesn't get up. She still doesn't seem afraid of me.

"You've seen Her essence move through the world, haven't you?" the angel asks.

"I've seen it from the first! But unlike you, I'm not willing to trust it blindly."

"Then what do you trust?"

"Myself. My power. And before you give me that sanctimonious *pitiful* look, explain to me just how you're so much *better*."

"I never claimed to be better than you. I think I'm just happier."

"And that somehow justifies you?"

"Since giving up hate and anger and grief, I feel little need for justification."

"Ah. You've given up hate and anger and grief. Good for you." I lean in. "How does Valla feel about all that?"

"She feels fine."

"She feels *fine*? You mean she *enjoys* having her every action controlled, her every movement scrutinized, her every impulse stifled by an alien master? You act so tranquil and serene, but is it because you've forgotten, Valla? Forgotten how you stole her body, dominated her, and how you now *deny* her the very freedom you went to Hell to protect?"

"It's not like that."

"Isn't it?"

"It was at first, but Valla accepts me now."

"Oh, that's nice. I've heard of this. People so afraid to live their lives that they'd rather have a demon do

it for them. And when you do — conveniently getting a body for yourself, of course — everyone's happy. Like a junkie, she's given up her worries." I shake my head. "Do you really think you're doing her a *favor*?"

She shakes her head back at me. It's infuriating.

"Why don't you ask her yourself? I think it's finally time."

And then she's gone.

I don't mean the body is gone. I mean the spirit inside it. The fleshy lump that was Ouestucati's home is still sitting in my office. It is changed, but the same. There is no physically different feature. No gain or loss to human measure, and yet... the angel is gone. All that remains is a woman.

She looks around, puzzled.

I'm confused as well.

"Valla?" I ask.

"Do I know you?"

"I suppose not." I scratch one eyebrow. "What do you remember?"

"I remember... someone. Someone who loved me." She wrinkles her forehead. "It's like waking from a dream."

"It's all right," I say, and more. I say it in a way that any mortal must believe.

"I think I tried to kill myself," she says softly.

"But you don't want to now."

"No," she says with a little frown. But it's not sad at all, just confusing, and it gives way to relief. "No, I'm better now."

For a moment, we're just quiet.

"Can I... go?" she asks.

I nod.

She stands, turns to the door, and then stops. "I think she left you a message."

"Yes?"

She pauses and clears her throat. "When you get hurt, you have two options. You can let your pain teach you about the pain of others, or you can let it blind you to it."

"Okay."

"That's the first thing. The second is, 'You've also assumed that saving it is the right thing to do.' Does that make sense?"

I nod. She leaves.

"Ouestucati?" I ask the empty air.

There's no reply, not even the resistance of being ignored. The spirit that bore that name is no longer within my reach.

★ ★ ★

I'm still thinking about that a month later in the bunker. I'm still wondering if my pain made me blind

or let me see. There's one man left, curled up in the corner, clawing at his eyes and hollering. I wish someone would take him away or kill him, but I'm really too busy to think about it.

"Haiti's erupted," M'Tappi says tersely. Are we speaking Russian? English? Enochian? It doesn't matter anymore.

"Send in the Grey Harriers and leak it to the Reconcilers that I'm very alarmed and am going in person."

With the Grey Harriers delaying them, how many ghosts can escape into the lands of the living before the Reconcilers show up and deal with it? It's a shame to lose the Grey Harriers, but they're the second best Slayers I've got to sacrifice. The best are already deployed in Greece, where the Shroudlands pushed through to Earth two days ago. But that's small potatoes.

"What's going on in California?" I ask. Nazathor mutters, then says, "The Golden are moving into position now."

"I've figured it out," Azacachia announces, poking her dark head up from behind a dull green metal cabinet. "Should be online any second now, once the backup generator warms up."

"Make it now."

She does, and the Cyrillic-lettered big board lights up.

"How long to get those launch codes?" I ask the Star Thorn, who is just waiting to betray me.

"Give me five minutes," he says.

"You have three."

I've pushed my entire schedule up a day-and-a-half so that things fall into place now, when Star Thorn is most likely to try and destroy me. He doesn't know that I know, of course. He's watched the strands closely, always vigilant, always using his lore to cloak his duplicity from my lore.

I didn't learn of his treachery through supernatural means. I knew his name, his nature, his very essence. Much of it, anyway. Certainly enough to predict how he'd handle thwarted love.

Star Thorn has some remnants of the Reconcilers and the Raveners lined up to strike. His abilities are remarkable. I'd have thought only a devil — and few of those — could get those kinds of allies together. But these are cold, deadly days, making for strange bedfellows.

"Mukikel? Report," I say, and the devil tersely describes her predicament. She's at the Gateway Arch, leading the maneuvers against Vodantu. Vassago seems to have imploded somehow, which was an unexpected boon. Belial and Dagon are at war against each other, and thereby in check. Two thirds of the fallen are under my control. But still, things aren't promising.

The world economy has fragmented and the pieces threaten to disintegrate altogether. One international conflict has gone nuclear, and two more are poised to do so. The oceans are impassable barriers for everyone but smugglers and warships, thanks to continental quarantines. Solar flares are wreaking havoc with television and cell-phone reception, and will probably result in serious health problems in 20 years. If anyone still has health in 20 years. There's flooding along every coastline, the eastern coast of Africa hasn't seen sunlight in close to a week, and eighty percent of the Americas are under martial law.

On top of all that, Asmodeus has an international church numbering in the hundreds of thousands. The only religion that has grown faster is the worship of me, the Adversary, Lucifer.

I contemplate my next move and wonder if it's worth it. I've broken down and become a god to these people, a false idol, something I never wanted to be. But I couldn't escape it. I couldn't stop them if I tried. The best I could do is use the power I have to try to do what's in the world's best interest.

Here are the problems with Utilitarianism and the Categorical Imperative: Each assumes perfect knowledge.

The greatest good for the greatest number seems an admirable goal, if you can foresee *every* consequence of your actions. But no one can. When the automobile was invented, it seemed like a wonderful device. So clean, the perfect solution to filthy streets caked with disease-carrying horse shit. But how many people have died from that perfect solution?

So, you can really only aim for what you *think* does the greatest good, and then you're back at intent again. But Woodrow asked the right question: How does pure intent absolve you when disaster results? More, how can one be sure of the purity of one's intent? Men, no less than demons, are creatures of complicated motives. We lie to ourselves more often than to others. That's been true since the day lies were invented.

The Star Thorn thinks he's betraying me out of love for Nazathor, but he won't let himself know that she'll kill herself if he succeeds. I know. I wish I didn't and wish she wouldn't, but I wish many things were different than they are.

Love. The same reason we all gave for our first disobedience.

He's badly distracted now. Between maneuvering for his ambush and trying to fool me by doing the tasks that I've set him. He has no time or attention to turn his insight on me, so I am free to turn mine on him.

The Star Thorn will draw forth the Sombre Axe and strike me from behind in 67 seconds.

He believes his attack is the best thing for himself, his love and the world. If he's right, Utilitarianism would deem his treachery ethically immaculate.

Sixty. Fifty-nine.

My malefactors have made a bomb from stolen uranium, an atom bomb that operates on the spiritual as well as the physical plane. It is, at last, a weapon even more deadly to demons than to men. But I have only one. Soon I will need to decide where to detonate it... if anywhere.

Forty-eight. Forty-seven. Forty-six.

Things are going badly in St. Louis, where Mukikel is now learning that the other Sombre Axe she holds is not the most dangerous. But things are just as bad in Los Angeles.

In 30 seconds, Star Thorn's axe will swing at me and his troops will assault a bunker in Russia, only to learn that their leader was misled.

This is it. The climax of the universe. The final answer we make to a question that I, alone, know God was asking.

Ten. Nine. Eight.

I wish I knew what happened to Ouestucati. I wish I knew who empowered the Bright Shiners.

I wish I knew what to do next.

Four.

Three.

Two.

WHAT IS THE ONYX PATH?

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Know ^{By} These Signs ^{That} The Time ^{OF} Judgment ^{Is} Upon Us

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And A Great Conflagration Ensues.

In the **Second** Sign, the Blood Runs Thin
And Creatures Unknown Rise.

In the **Third** Sign, the Grave Gives Up the Dead
To Fight a War with the Quick.

In the **Fourth** Sign, the Sky Grows Red
And the Wisest Fall.

In the **Fifth** Sign, the Dead God Rises
And Begets His Children

In the **Sixth** Sign, the Damned Are Loosed
And the City of Angels Trembles and Burns.

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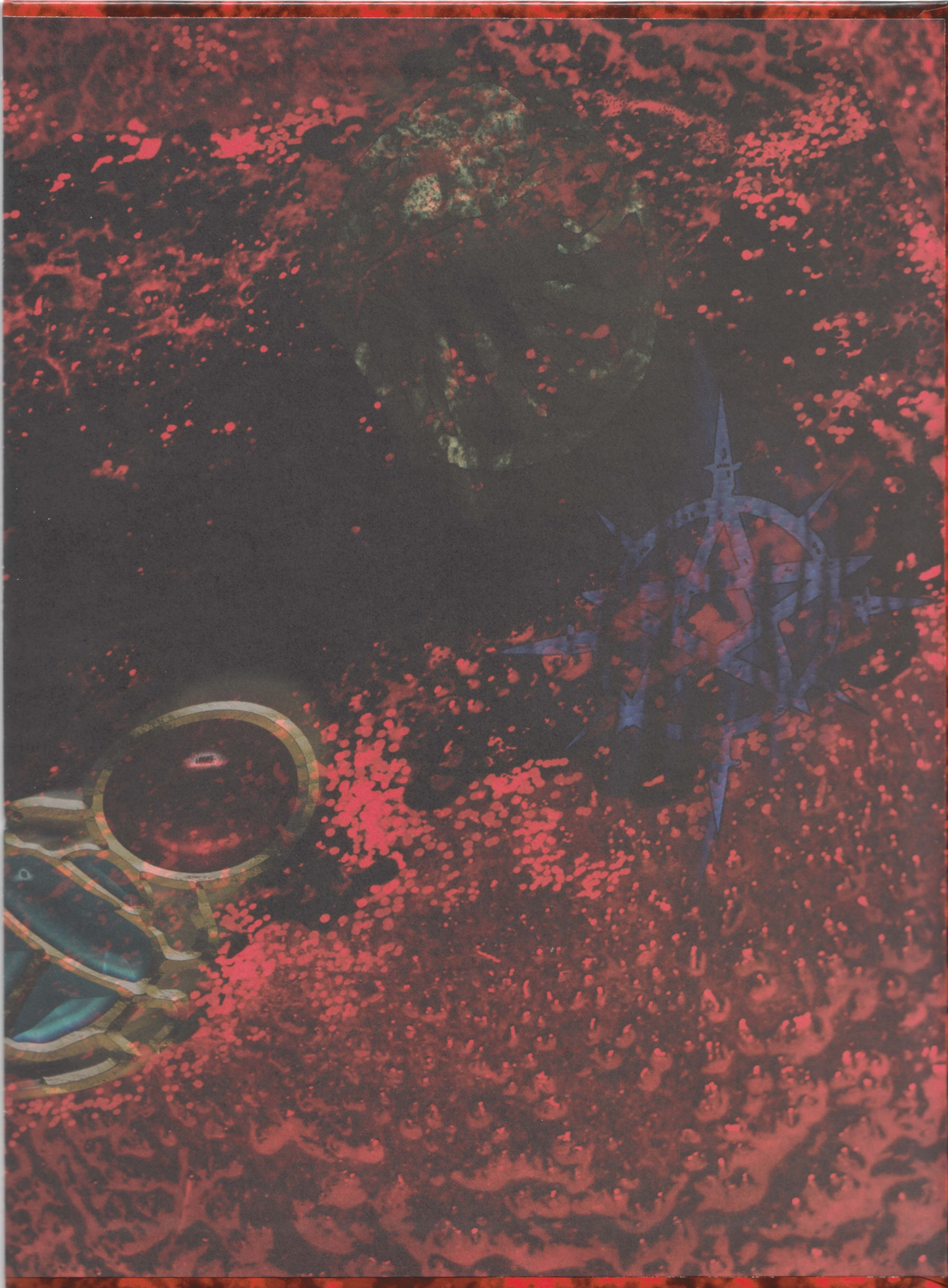
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